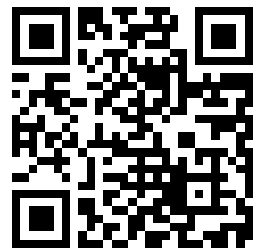

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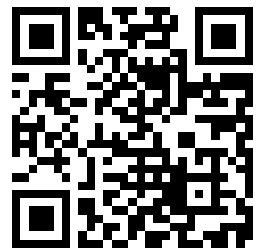
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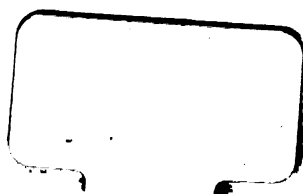
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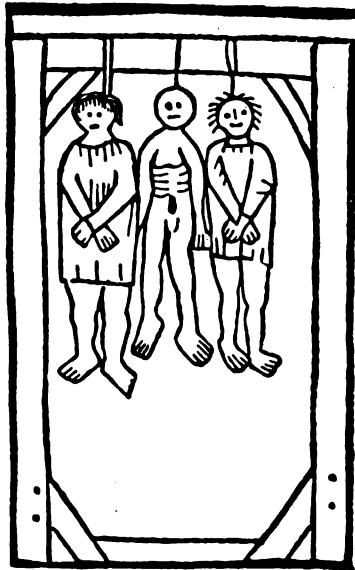
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Saybrookville
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THE GREAT
AND LITTLE
TESTAMENTS
OF FR. VILLON.



Epitaphe dudit Billon
 freres humains qui apres no^r viues
 Napez les cueurs contre no^r endurcis
 Car se pitie de no^r pouurez auez
 Dieu en aura plusloft de vous mercis
 Vous nous voies cy ataches cinq sis
 Quant de la char q trop au des nourrie
 Elleft pieca deuoutte et poutrie
 et no^r les os deuends cédies a pouldie
 De nostre mal perfonne ne fen rie
 Mais pures-dieu que tous nous huril
 le absouldie

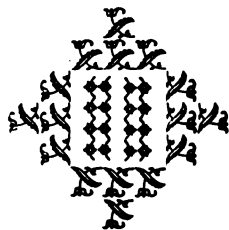
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Facsimile of
 P. Levet's Edition of 1489.

*THE TESTAMENTS
OF
FRANÇOIS VILLON*

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN HERON LEPPER



*PRIVATELY PRINTED
FOR SUBSCRIBERS. THE
CASANOVA SOCIETY.
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To
Louis J. McQuilland.

VILLON:
The Man and the Poet.

THE SOLE OBJECT of the following pages is to bring together in a succinct form all that we know, & it is not much, of the life of a man who lived some four hundred years ago: a man of strong passions and great genius; one whose poetry contains much levity & not a little pathos, a strange medley where the most vulgar buffoonery cuts capers on the stage beside the stern figures of tragedy & regret; one whose manners appear to have been none of the choicest even for that day of licence; whose morals require the veil of charitable excuse; whose whole career, as we know it, formed a chain of discreditable escapades. Such was the scapegrace student of Paris University who has become one of the glories of French literature, Master Francis Villon.

He was born, as we learn from the Grand Testament, at Paris in the year 1431. The times were troubled and unsettled, and the unrest was mirrored in the lives of the people. For a long time war had been in the land.

The Hundred Years' War!

The rightful king of France was exiled from his capital. The French nation was a house divided against itself, suffering all the horrors of civil strife and foreign invasion.

The year that witnessed the poet's birth saw two other notable events in the history of France: the martyrdom of Jeanne d'Arc la bonne Lorraine at Rouen from whose ashes rose the star of French unity, and the coronation of our Henry VI, then a boy of ten, as king of France in the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. It is a striking coincidence that the very year which brought two such humiliations to France saw the birth of the man who leads the procession of her patriotic poets.

B I

FRANÇOIS VILLON

Master Francis was five years old before the king of France enjoyed his own again in the city of Saint Geneviève, and many more had to pass after that before Paris recovered from the confusion of laws & manners introduced by a foreign occupation. The most susceptible years of the young poet's life were passed in a state of society that was weakened by civil war, corrupted by the vices of the camp, & surfeited with that unholy mixture of tyranny & licence which afflicts the life of a people in times of public insecurity. The administration of civil justice was in a chaotic condition: there was one law for the peasant, another for the burgess, yet another for the scholar, with different jurisdictions having authority over each class; thus a skilful criminal by playing off one magistrate against another might often ultimately escape the consequences of his misdeeds. We shall get a glimpse at what resulted in following the story of our poet.

It seems fairly certain that the name Villon is one of adoption, but by no means so certain what was his true patronymic, & scholars are divided in their opinions about his claims to be known as François de Montcorbier, de Monterbier, or de Monteclier. Possibly his signature may have favoured some latitude of doubt as in the case of Shakespere. At any rate he chose to call himself Villon, and no one had a better right to decide the name by which posterity should know him.

This much is beyond dispute, as we have his own word for it, he sprang from a family of the people & had no claim to rank with the noblesse. (Grand Testament: stanza XXXV). In early youth the boy would seem to have been adopted by a priest, Guillaume de Villon, who provided him with the means of studying & helped him on the many occasions in after life when summer friends were not to be found though sought. Several passages in the Grand Testament witness the affection the poet bore to this foster-father; & when broken in health by the effects of riotous living & prison, the madcap appears less affected by his own miserable condition than the thought of the grief it will cause to his benefactor & also to his old mother, la povre femme.

From his own revelations & contemporary evidence we learn

only too exactly what the conduct was that ruined Master Francis in health & reputation. It may be summed up as idleness, carelessness, a disregard for every kind of law, & a determination to seize the present moment, cost what it might.

Villon was not a victim of self-deception. He does not search the stars for excuses, or mumble platitudes about fate. So far from being under any delusions about the cause of his sorrows, he tells us frankly that if his life has been a failure the fault was his own. In all his writings it would be hard to find a line accusing fortune or luck; he accepts what has happened without whining & speaks of the past without many glosses; nor does he deign to offer an apology to men, but carries his contrition to a place where he believes it will have a better chance of being accepted. He has the courage of his vices, but he also has the courage of his regrets; we know too little of his latter days to decide whether he had the courage of amendment.

Were nothing worse to be revealed than those sins of which Villon accuses himself in his poems, his *Lehrjahre* might be skimmed over with the excuse that his faults were those of his age & generation, redeemed in his case by wit & the love of merriment; but the advocatus diaboli demands to be heard with extracts from mouldy old law papers, disinterred from the Archives Nationales by the industry of modern men of letters. They tell the following story.

About nine o'clock on the evening of Corpus Christi Day, 1455, three young people were sitting together on a stone bench beneath the belfry of Saint Benoît le Bientourné in Paris. They had supped in company & were passing the fine summer evening amicably enough out of doors, chatting, gossiping or what not. One was a damsel, of whom we know nothing except her name Ysabeau, but we can picture her readily enough with her long, trailing robes, tight-fitting bodice & wide sleeves, her merry face peeping from beneath the curious steeple headdress of the times: no prude I opine. The second in that company was a priest, one Gilles, whose profession, alas, is no guarantee of his respectability. The third was a student of the university Master Francis, called

FRANÇOIS VILLON

Villon from his adopted father who was one of the canons attached to the church beneath whose clock-tower they were gathered. Guillaume de Villon lived in the neighbourhood, & we may take it that his adopted son had slipped out of the house in order to spend a social hour with his two cronies or others of a more jovial kidney than were to be met with at home. The dryasdust law papers have preserved some details of his appearance : he was clad in a short mantle on account of the cold night air & at his girdle carried the dagger which was an indispensable part of the costume of the time.

The scene of peace beneath the belfry did not last long, for there entered a spark of discord in the shape of Philippe Chermois, another priest, accompanied by a certain Jehan le Mardie, described as a Master of Arts. That the newly arrived cleric bore a grudge against one of the company soon became evident, for on Villon rising & inviting him and his companion to take a seat beside them on the bench Philippe Chermois declared with a most unclerical oath : " I have found you at last, so you can make up your mind to give me satisfaction ! "

" Most reverend Master Philippe," replied Villon, " what have I done to you ? Why are you so angry ? "

The only reply he received from the other was a blow that stretched him on the pavement. Villon picked himself up, and, without retaliating, decamped towards the cloister where his adopted father lived. The three spectators of the brawl, Mistress Ysabeau, Priest Gilles and Master Jehan le Mardie made off at top speed ; they foresaw trouble and did not wish to be drawn into it.

Chermois pursued his enemy up to the doors of the cloister where he overtook him. Then drawing a long dagger from beneath his robe he struck Villon with it in the face, wounding him on the lower lip. Villon, having by this time got out his own weapon, stabbed the other in return, but the belligerent priest was too carried away by rage to feel the wound. At this stage in the proceedings Master Jehan le Mardie reappeared and, no doubt with the idea of doing his friend a good turn, grappled with Villon

and succeeded in disarming him; thereupon the latter seeing himself weaponless picked up a paving-stone and with it struck Philippe Chermois on the head, so that he fell to the ground senseless.

With the priest disabled the brawl came to an end. Villon fled to the house of a barber-surgeon in order to get his wound dressed, & was questioned by the leech as to how he came by his hurt, as the profession was obliged by law to report such matters to the police, then as now, there as here, a body that concerned itself much with names & addresses & other folk's private affairs. Villon gave an account of the quarrel & the true name of his antagonist, but modestly offered a nom de guerre for himself; the inference being that he wished to steer wide of the forces of law & order. As for Philippe Chermois, he was carried into a house near the scene of the fight, & a surgeon & the mediæval equivalent of a commissaire de police were summoned to attend him. The officer asked him, if in the event of his death he wished his friends & relatives to proceed criminally against his adversary? He replied, that he did not so desire, on account of certain causes which had moved him to do as he had done. Evidently in the hour of death Chermois's conscience accused him of having been the aggressor & bringing his fate upon himself. He was removed to a hospital where he died in a few days, and Villon fled away from Paris to escape prosecution. The exile, however, was not to last for long. In January 1456 lettres d'abolition, otherwise a free pardon, was granted him for the murder, on condition that he conducted himself well in other matters, & had never been convicted of any other crime or misdemeanour.

As to the origin of the feud between Villon & Chermois we must fall back on conjecture. The French commentators, typically enough, suggest a histoire de femme, a lady in the case, & mention a certain Katherine de Vauselles, on whose account Villon once received a good drubbing, as he confesses in one of the ballades; but there is nothing to show that Chermois had any interest in that affair, or that the lady had anything to do

with the quarrel on Corpus Christi Day. So many names of fair ladies occur in the poet's verse that it would be a very acute critic who dared presume to saddle any one of them with the discredit of the fatal quarrel in the neighbourhood of Saint Benoît le Bientourné. One of Villon's French editors remarks :

It is probable that his love affairs were very varied & very transient. It is certain that they landed him in more than one scrape ; that of the cloister Saint Benoît doubtless being the first in date.

This last conjecture seems highly improbable, but let it pass.

So far Master Francis appears more sinned against than sinning, but the next scrap of biography that has come down to us, & be it noted that these scraps are few & far between, carries the conviction that we are not dealing with one who was a model of all the virtues.

About Christmas 1456 we find Villon preparing to leave Paris once more. He was then living in the house of his protector in the cloister Saint Benoît where he had returned on receiving his pardon eleven months before. By way of preparation for this new excursion into the provinces he occupied some time in writing a will in verse, the poem now known as Le Petit Testament. It was no new theme, for other versifiers had already brought this form of literary exercise into fashion, but Villon seasoned his legacies with a cynical humour & invective that were not borrowed from his predecessors. Most of the gibing allusions to his contemporaries cannot now be explained even by the commentators, & for the ordinary scholar the spice & flavour have not improved by keeping, but the poem is most valuable as affording us a glimpse at Villon's friends, their amusements & occupations, their haunts & their hobbies, their follies & their fates. The fact at once becomes disclosed, even were external evidence of another kind wanting, that the wild young man was hand in glove with all the ruffians of the University, in comparison with

whom the mauvais sujets of our modern seats of learning would appear very miracles of innocence.

In this connection let us hear what one of the editors has to say about student life in Paris in the fifteenth century.

The University of Paris with its privileges, which made it a state within the state, with its population gathered up from all over Europe and, for the greater part, without private resources, often concealed the most dangerous class of criminal, those whom a certain culture gave more capacity for mischief and more skill in evading the pursuit of justice. Every time that an assassin or a robber belonging to the student class was arrested there ensued a conflict between the ecclesiastical authorities, who claimed the right to judge him as a clerk, and the royal jurisdiction. The ecclesiastical authorities almost invariably acquitted the criminals. In order that the civil magistrate could lay hands on them again crime had to succeed crime, until the delinquents were considered to have deprived themselves of the clerical privilege, and to have fallen *in profundum malorum* ; this was the consecrated formula.

Such a favourable situation attracted to the University a swarm of scoundrels, sons of ruined families and rakes ; to attain the rank of scholar it was enough to enter one's name for some course of lectures. In consequence of this, there soon developed brotherhoods consisting of robbers, thieves, cheats and picklocks ; the lost legion of the Schools gave most trouble to the Parisian police.

There will be something to add later about this brotherhood of criminals wherein Villon became an initiate, but for the present let us return to Le Petit Testament, whence an idea can be gained of the companions with whom he was hail fellow well met. His associates are Regnier de Montigny who had

fallen in profundum malorum & whose privileges as a cleric did not save his neck from the hangman's rope, Perrenet de la Barre who lived on what he could make by cheating at dice, Jean le Loup and Chollet who combined business with pleasure by robbing hen-roosts, & many other youths of bad repute whose ways of life were not such as commend themselves to an apologist. What a commentary on the adage that a man shall be known by his friends !

Alas, Villon's acquaintance with the seamy side of life does not stop short at bad company in his own station. He exhibits an unhealthy knowledge of every tavern and disreputable haunt in old Paris ; he knows & is known by the police ; he has even come in contact with the whips of justice, and can judge by experience of the view seen through the barred windows of the Châtelet prison. Of a truth, says one of his biographers drily, this is no novice ; there is nothing of the milk-sop about him !

At the beginning of the Petit Testament the poet tells us that he is leaving Paris for Angers very soon, & gives as reason for this departure the cruelty of a lady with whom he is in love. Unfortunately for his reputation the real reason for this journey is now known ; it was occasioned less by a woman's frown than the jingling of an old gentleman's money-bags & perhaps a dread of the gallows as well. To understand the situation we must again examine the criminal records of the time.

On the 9th of March 1457 the priests & professors of the Collège de Navarre at Paris were thrown into consternation by the discovery that during the previous night the sacristy had been entered, the treasure-chest broken open, & all the money in it, amounting to five hundred golden crowns, a large sum in those days, carried away. The police were called in, & with the conservatism of their class proceeded to take notes & draw up a report. Their investigations showed that a large iron-bound chest had been broken open & also a smaller one chained inside it containing merely memoranda of money deposited at various times. They ransacked the rooms of those supposed to be in charge of the sacristy, but without result ; they summoned a jury of expert

locksmiths, who examined the damaged chest & declared the breaking open to be the work of amateurs & of recent origin : that was all the satisfaction the poor priests got for the time being. The authorities discovered plenty of clues but not the thieves.

Some time passed & on the eve of *Quasimodo Sunday* (admirers of Victor Hugo will appreciate the date) a certain country clergyman, Messire Pierre Marchant, rector of Paras in the diocese of Chartres, came up to Paris on his lawful occasions. Dining one day at a tavern he made the acquaintance of a student, a pleasant young fellow, Master Guy de Tabarie, & aided, perhaps, by the good cheer, the two soon became very friendly. So confidential did the younger man wax that he divulged many things he had better have concealed, going to the length of boasting that he was one of the most skilful picklocks in Paris ; nor did he hide the fact that he had just escaped from the archbishop's prison where he had been confined on account of this fatal dexterity. Furthermore, when Messire Pierre mentioned the robbery at the Collège de Navarre as a matter agitating the minds of the idle, Guy de Tabarie asserted with pride that he had been one of the gang which had extracted the clerical treasures from the sacristy ; and he then proceeded to describe the cracking of the crib with so much minuteness of detail that no doubt was left as to the genuine character of his story.

For reasons of his own, the country priest appeared not in the least shocked by these youthful indiscretions of his new-found friend ; on the contrary, he was loud in his applause of such dexterity. Finding him such a genial old soul, Guy de Tabarie then escorted him to Notre Dame & showed him half a dozen young men lounging about the ambulatory who had sought sanctuary there after escaping from the archbishop's enforced lodgings. The fifteenth-century Parson Adams was introduced to these promising young prentice clergy & past masters in the craft of thieving, & gave himself out to be much edified by their conversation. So intimate did they become that Guy proposed Messire Pierre should join them in another robbery they contemplated. Its

execution was being delayed, he said, only till the young gentlemen had provided themselves with false keys & till an Augustine monk of their acquaintance should return to Paris, he having promised to hide them in his chamber after the deed was done. Guy also gave his open-eared friend a great deal more information, which however interesting in itself as a commentary on student life of the day does not call for repetition here. One item, however, throws some light on a journey undertaken by a member of the gang.

One of their accomplices, said Guy de Tabarie, was Master Francis Villon; and at present he was at Angers in an abbey where he had an uncle a priest. He was paying his visit there in order to find out all about an old priest of the abbey who was supposed to be worth five or six hundred crowns; & they were only awaiting his return & report before they went to Angers in a body to relieve the old man of the trouble of looking after so much wealth.

Messire Pierre Marchant by this time thought he had heard enough & withdrew himself from their society. Soon after he went to the police &, in the language of prisons, blew the gaff. It was quite a year after that, however, before Guy de Tabarie was at last arrested & shut up in the Châtelet prison. Justice in those days had leaden feet. Of course he pleaded his quality as a scholar, & was at once removed to the archbishop's prison. Here in June 1458, a sad day of reckoning came to him. The scheme of spoliation devised by him & his comrades was too much in advance of the times; the question both ordinary & extraordinary was applied, & under the torture of the rack he gave a full account of the robbery at the Collège de Navarre, incriminating amongst others Francis Villon. Be it noted in passing, Guy bitterly complained of having been cheated by his companions in the division of the spoil.

Villon was arrested & interrogated in the same way as his friend, that is under torture, but of a different kind. The torment consisted in making the poet swallow large quantities of cold water, a beverage for which he ever after entertained a hearty

& not unnatural aversion. We may take it that he made a full confession, for he was found guilty & sentenced to be hanged. It was while lying under sentence of death that he composed the famous couplet, to be freely & euphemistically translated as follows :—

Here is Francis, one of the boys,
Born in Paris, near to Ponthoise,
Whose neck in a noose must learn the joys
Of weighing his body's avoirdupois.

He also wrote a ballade at the same time, one of his best, wherein a picture is drawn of the poet & his companions as they will appear to onlookers when their souls have gone to find le grand peut-être. In those days the corpses of criminals were exposed on the gibbet where they suffered & did not receive Christian burial, a vile old custom, now happily abolished, that lasted till well within the last century; it cannot have been a grateful sight to the virtuous, & assuredly did not act as a deterrent to the wicked.

To return to our poet's fate. The rope was not easily knotted in those days to contract the throat that claimed benefit of clergy. Villon appealed to the Parliament, & no doubt his adopted father brought influence to bear in high quarters: in any case, the appeal was allowed. The sentence was commuted into banishment from the kingdom, which may be interpreted as banishment to a safe distance from Paris.

Villon appears to have chosen Meung as his St. Helena, for there he turns up in 1461 having come to loggerheads with the authorities again, now personified in Thibault d'Aussigny bishop of Orleans. The cause of the disagreement so far remains unrevealed, but it resulted in Villon spending the whole summer of that year in an underground dungeon of the Castle of Meung on a diet of water and stale bread, and not too much of the bread. No doubt the bishop thought these lodgings the most suitable spot for an embryo cleric of knavish tendencies, & in laying Villon

by the heels was actuated by the most worthy motives ; unhappily for the prelate's good repute we possess only Villon's account of the matter, & it is hardly to be expected that he should have viewed their little difference of opinion with unprejudiced eyes. Hence, rightly or wrongly, Thibault d'Aussigny is held up to the odium of all succeeding ages as an oppressor & unjust judge. Danger dogs his footsteps who offends a poet : the fifteenth century bishop finds himself in the company of many distinguished men whose characters have suffered because they fell foul of contemporaries who had the knack of catching the ear of posterity. What Voltaire did for Frederick the Great, what Skelton did for Cardinal Wolsey, that was done for Thibault d'Aussigny by Villon at the first opportunity. That opportunity might never have come, & the world might have been the poorer wanting Le Grand Testament, had not the young king Louis XI made a state entry into Meung on the 1st of October 1461. To celebrate this event the gaols were thrown open, & among other prisoners released was the scholar scamp.

His sojourn in the dungeon had ruined his health, already impaired by the excesses of his previous life, and he came into the open air prematurely grey, his vitality sapped, &, as he says himself, already an old man at thirty. What he thought about Meung, its bishop & his officials may be read in detail in Le Grand Testament itself.

The hardships which had broken Villon's body had at the same time tempered & refined his spirit. Too weakened by privation to fly back at once to the gay, careless, wanton way of life that had been his delight aforetime, he turned to poetry for consolation. Helped, no doubt, by friends & his adopted father, he withdrew to some quiet lodging, we do not know in what city, & there composed Le Grand Testament, his magnum opus, a wonderful poem the world will not soon let die. And with this swan song Master Francis disappears from our ken.

Whether his health returned & with it he betook himself to his former courses we do not know ; the black curtain of the centuries has come down on the stage where he acted, & no voice

out of the darkness tells us anything more of his hates or jests or sorrows or loves ; not even the year of his death or name of his final resting place has come down to us.

Only one other significant fact regarding his life has to be recorded. During the fifteenth century an association called the Beggars, Les Gueux, had come into existence forming a kind of mediæval freemasonry of crime, distinguished by grades or degrees of eminence, & possessing a cant language the better to conceal its mysteries. As this brotherhood had modelled itself on the rules of the Guild of Merciers, one of the names it assumed to distinguish one of its tribes (there were at least five of these tribes paying allegiance to the Roi de Thunes, the grand master of these ragamuffins) was that of the mercerots, or mercelots. To this fraternity there is no doubt that Villon belonged. In the Grand Testament he refers to himself as a mercerot de Rennes, & he wrote ballades in the jargon of the order, which remained a puzzle to commentators till the genius & industry of M. Vitu showed the way to their meaning. Knowing this fact helps us to a better understanding of why all his life Villon fell from one scrape into another, & it also may explain some of the obscurity met with in his poetry which may have an esoteric meaning not to be understood by the profane.

Thus far we have found nothing very worthy of examination, an idle, dissipated, unbalanced, rhyming scholar, without pride & without shame ; such is the Villon revealed by contemporary records, to borrow again the words of a French biographer, a true bandit. But to know all is to forgive all. Quite another man discloses himself in his poetry ; the sin & shame still cling to him but cannot obscure his fascination & charm.

In what does that charm consist : why does he fascinate us ? A friend to whom I put this question replied : " Because he is so modern." Does not that criticism, however, hold good of the whole galaxy of immortals ? Your true bard, whether he lived in the centuries before Christ, or in the dark ages, or in our self-styled days of enlightenment, possesses the magic of being able to make the human heart throb in time to his music, & so

far as records go the human heart does not seem to have altered much through the æons. Since first men began to inscribe their thoughts & feelings on dead materials, from the first incised flint to the latest evening edition, the sage, the historian, the poet has been assured of a larger audience than draws breath in his own day, an audience, too, that goes on widening, if the message be worth hearing. In the great choir of poets singing of the eternally interesting in more tongues than Babel knew we cannot deny Villon an honoured place; for he is concerned with things that will attract men's thoughts so long as humanity remains what it is; & his outlook on life is not bounded by the environment of his own generation, but transcends prejudices & reaches a standpoint, whence the trifles that make up an individual existence become merged in the stream that bears all mankind forward to fulfil its destiny. He sees & describes the very river of life whereof at the moment we form atoms; he thinks our very thoughts; he dreamt the same dreams as we in our youth; he has anticipated the philosophy of our riper years; no wonder we find him interesting.

As few writers have made a more complete confession of their feelings or faults, after studying his poems for some time we begin to know the writer very well indeed & can supplement the scanty facts of his biography by what we learn from himself. These bits of self-revelation enable us to understand him better, & this essay may fittingly be closed with a few indications to serve as general sign-posts for the student.

*He was no profound scholar, & yet the width of his knowledge is surprising. Contemporary & ancient history are drawn on by him with ease when the lines of a ballade have to be filled with imagery, or an illustration found to parallel his own mishaps. The philosophy of the day is sufficiently familiar to him to be parodied in *Le Petit Testament*. He can argue theology in verse with imaginary opponents. Latin is well known to him; with Greek he has an acquaintance of sorts, & has evidently read some of the New Testament in that tongue. He has observed operatives working at their craft, merchants plying their trades,*

the learned professions engaged in their occupations, & is able to borrow metaphors & similes from them all to enliven his own verses. If Villon's knowledge was merely that of an idle scholar, as he asserts, then the standard of learning obtainable at a fifteenth century university was by no means to be despised.

His education as a lover appears to have been equally extensive ; but it suffered from the licence of the times. The Hundred Years' War had had its effect upon morals as destructively & as surely as all wars must tend to destroy idealism & exalt brute passion. Undoubtedly he met many facile beauties in his years of adolescence ; undoubtedly his behaviour was abominable ; undoubtedly on many occasions his pleasant sins entailed painful penalties ; & these perhaps are some of the reasons why his verse is lacking in that high respect, that tender chivalry we are more accustomed to associate with a poet's conception of women. Compare the work of Chaucer writing three generations previously & no one can hesitate to call the Englishman the better gentleman. But before passing judgment let it not be forgotten that the latter was writing in the shadow of a court, in a land undevastated by invasion & outrage, in a position of comfortable independence that always induces a man to see the best side of things ; while the Frenchman was poor, the citizen of a country impoverished by an alien mailed fist, & occupied that grade of society, the intellectual bourgeoisie, most susceptible to all the moral diseases begotten by the aftermath of war.

Yet Villon, as we shall see in reading his poems, did not wholly lose his respect for womanhood. Misfortune in waylaying him seems too often to have worn petticoats, & he retaliates with enough ribald jests and sarcasms directed against the whole female sex. Katherine de Vauselles is worth a whipping to him, & he scarifies all womankind in a ballade by way of retaliation ; Rose makes a fool of him, & he has some bitter things to say about feminine cunning ; another damsel deserts him, & he vents his disappointment in language gathered from the Parisian gutter. Yet no mere cynic & voluptuary could have written those marvellous pieces of delight The complaint of the

Fair Armouress & the ballade of Dead Ladies. If he wasted too much of his time with la grosse Margot, still he was not without his dreams of la bonne Lorraine: he opens a mouth soiled by the husks of the Prodigal to praise the saints in heaven with no unmelodious hymns.

It may seem a paradox to call Villon a moral writer, for few have given us sadder pictures of human depravity or shown better acquaintance with evil things; yet no one has portrayed more exactly the unavoidable ugliness & inevitable retributions that accompany vice. If a man breaks God's commandments he must pay the price, declares our poet; & he drives home the argument much more convincingly than Defoe is able to do with all his sermonising, or Swift with all his grossness. No man who reads Villon's account of his own peccadilloes will be tempted to follow in the same path. He strips vice so completely that not even a rag of glamour is left her. The process is indecorous, but certainly not immoral.

From one inexhaustible source of delight to a poet, the marvel & beauty of nature, Villon drew but little, & indeed seems to be lacking in a perception of it, for he weaves no magic out of woods, hills & meres in his verse. The country to him is a place of hard work & sudden dangers. Clowns till its fields, wolves & bandits lurk among its copses. Perhaps this indicates a deliberate breaking away on his part from the conventional mediæval school of poetry, which demanded that every prosodical exercise should begin with a description of a May morning in the fields, with a sufficiently lengthy list of birds singing in the boughs, & dewdrops hanging on every flower the poet could recall to mind. The rapture had been overdone by a swarm of rhyming clerks, & few of them could compress the beauty of such a landscape into lines such as these:—

The bisy lerkē, messenger of day,
 Salueth in hir song the morwe grey ;
 And fyery Phebus ryseth up so brightē,
 That all the orient laugheth of the lightē,
 And with his stremēs dryeth in the grevēs
 The silver dropēs, hanging on the levēs.

The country to Villon is a place where idle scholars may steal ducks out of ponds, where brambles grow that tear the clothes, where there are frozen rivers in winter & a hot sun in summer. He prefers to be a poet of the town. He performs his "observaunce to May" in the tavern ; bubbles of wine delight his eyes more than dewdrops hanging on the thorn ; & for him the minster bells ringing the angelus take the place of feathered songsters. Yet he had been haunted by the charm of echoes returning across still lakes & rippling waters, & enshrined the experience in unforgettable lines. He may not, like certain contemporary descendants of the Lake School, exercise his ingenuity in making poetry of seedsmen's catalogues & naturalists' note-books, & prefers to concern himself with humanity ; but he never grows artificial or precious. When he deals with the certainty of life's end & the uncertainty shrouding the further side of the gate through which we all must pass, he rises far above the narrow streets & cramped dwellings wherein his life was cast. His verse swells up in a haunting dirge for all the beauty, goodness & wisdom that have gone the path of darkness before us. The best that life holds, so runs his threnody, must have its exit through this portal, leaving not a trace behind, no more than do last year's snows.

Life is good, says his philosophy ; & to be alive is in itself a consolation. Better a living pauper than a dead plutocrat ; & for this reason he would not change places with Jacques Coeur, who was the Rothschild of his generation. This sentiment reminds us of those pathetic lines written by Heine on his death-bed, wherein he bewails that the most miserable Philistine will soon be a better man than he, the hero gone to a world of shadows.

Even on the very brink of the grave Villon must have his jest, for he was no respecter of solemnities, though he seems to have been orthodox enough as a christian. In one of his mordant bequests he leaves to the hospital for the blind his large spectacles, without their case, so that the bedesmen whose duty was "in seemly sort their bodies to engrave" may see how to bury the righteous apart from the sinners in the cemetery. Then his very jest leads him back to the old theme ; all men are equal in death.

The clerk from master who can tell ?

Platitudes, doubtless, yet the type of reflection that never fails to strike our self-conceit with all the point of an epigram.

We are now led to consider two distinguishing characteristics of our poet, wit, that volatile salt to season the food of the gods, & the sense of humour, a thing we all pride ourselves upon possessing, yet find so hard to define. To pick out examples of both will not be difficult ; to choose the more decorous is not so easy, for no demesne was too sacred for Villon when in pursuit of a jest. He reached his high-water mark, perhaps, in writing of the ladies of Paris & Master Jehan Cotard ; but it would be captious to give the crown to one example of his inimitable method of laying hard names under contribution for rhymes to his ballades & illustrations to his arguments. As a typical example of his irony take the following stanza :—

These women too of tarnished fames
Grown old in poor and wretched state,
Beholding younger, pampered dames
Who still can charm and captivate,
Demand why God decreed their date
Of birth so soon, for they've grown old.
God holds His peace ; for in debate
He could not match a female scold.

No one who reads the Grand Testament will require proof of Villon's insight into the human heart ; enough would even be

found in the two ballades ostensibly addressed as sermons to those who were following the wandering fires whereby he himself had been misled. Truth to tell, these two poems display more knowledge of iniquity than conviction of remorse & rather abound in plain speaking than in a tendency to edification. Yet there was nothing of the Pharisee about Villon: while he did not hesitate to offer caustic comments on the mote in his neighbour's eye, he makes no attempt to conceal the beam in his own, otherwise we should not have made the acquaintance of la grosse Margot.

A creature of impulse, while taking many wrong paths he yet had longings & dissatisfactions, & he summed up in one line his philosophic acceptance of the riddle of life:

I know everything, except myself.

There to he was a keen observer of his fellow men, & has painted for us the Falstaff of his days, the pleasant lad changed into an old buffoon; the young gallants strutting about to show off their fawn-coloured boots; Dalilah with her myriad wiles; Dr. Slop with his lancets; mine host amid his barrels; the magistrates among their papers; the police in their habits as they lived; the underworld of old Paris; the whole dance of life in a fifteenth-century city.

We must add to the foregoing qualities his charity in judging of others' faults & failings, a charity never censorious & so wide that it might be interpreted as indifference, were it not that he condemns the sin but not the sinner. It appears sometimes with epigrammatic terseness, as when he asserts that 'tis need drives men to devilment & hunger wolves to leave the wood; sometimes it accompanies a personal apology & excuse; sometimes it shrouds the faults of a sinner, such as the fair Armouress, by compelling us to throw the cloak of our pity over all that has been done amiss.

All these traits are pleasing; & truly, while the spirits of men continue to be moved by wit & pathos blended together

FRANÇOIS VILLON

into melodious verse, so long will the scapegrace singer find readers, lovers and apologists.

It is by a lover rather than an apologist that the following translation of The Testaments has been made. Even those with a fair knowledge of modern French will be hard put to it at times to find out Villon's meaning, & some little study is required to master his language & tricks of style. This English version being intended as a guide for those who wish to know the poet better in the incomparable original is very literal, & while indulging in euphemistic circumlocutions at times on account of certain unsavoury puddles, yet endeavours to follow closely on the poet's footsteps. It is enough for the translator to indicate his object & let the judgment of others be the touchstone of his success.

JOHN HERON LEPPER.

Alas, the joy, the sorrow and the scorn,
That clothed thy life with hopes and sins and fears,
And gave thee stones for bread and tares for corn
And plume-plucked gaol-birds for thy starveling peers
Till death clipt close their flight with shameful shears—
Shame soiled thy song, and song assoiled thy shame,
But from thy feet now death has washed the mire,
Love reads out first at head of all our choir,
Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother's name.

Swinburne.

THE LAY OF MASTER FRANCIS VILLON

COMMONLY KNOWN AS

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT.

Written in 1456.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT

I.

THIS year of fourteen fifty-six
I *Francis Villon*, man of letters,
With might and main, full speed, prefix
Advice to all in Fortune's fetters,
To take the judgment of your betters
About your work, the truth to know;
Vegece has made us all his debtors,
The sage of Rome, by saying so.

II.

This winter, as was said before,
Near Christmas, season deathly old,
When wolves eat wind and nothing more,
And men are held indoors by cold
Where hearthstones glowing faggots hold,
The will I won to break a way
From Love's sweet gaol, whose walls enfold
My breaking heart this many a day.

III.

This way I take to end my anguish,
For She is there, before my eyes,
Quite satisfied to see me languish,
No happier in any wise:
My sorrows and complainings rise
Demanding vengeance from above
From amorous gods of every guise
And cure for all my pangs of love.

IV.

As I believe, she showed me favour
With soft regrets and fine deceit
To lend duplicity more savour
And make my overthrow complete ;
But as a horse of four white feet
What seemed so fair but brought displeasure :
I must replant this pleasaunce sweet
And go to dig for other treasure.

V.

Full harsh and hard was her oppression ;
For she who cast a spell on me,
Though I am guiltless of transgression,
Has doomed me die, and her decree
Is fixed that I shall cease to be.
I find no safety but in flight.
She means to break my life, I see,
Nor will take pity on my plight.

VI.

This danger to escape, I trow,
The best plan is to run away.
Adieu ! I'm off to Angers now,
Since she ungraciously says nay,
Nor will a shred of ruth display.
Though free from bodily complaints,
I die Love's martyr, I might say,
Thus numbered with his band of saints.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT

VII.

Although departing brings despair,
Needs must, in truth, that I should fly.
As I conceive of the affair :
She loves another on the sly.
No kipper of Boulogne so dry
And tasteless as my wretched fate !
May God in mercy hear my cry :
For I am in a piteous state.

VIII.

Well then, since go away I must,
And of return uncertain feel :
(Since I'm a being formed of dust,
No more than others brass or steel ;
Unstable is all human weal
And death cannot be scared away :)
So, setting out, I now reveal
My will, these presents, in this lay.

IX.

Then first, in His our Father dear,
The Son, and Holy Spirit's name,
Our Lady's too, whom we revere,
Whose grace keeps all of us from shame,
I leave, God helping me, my fame
To *Guillaume Villon*, foster sire,
My goods and chattels, and proclaim
The honour that those names inspire.

X.

To her who harried me so hard
And banished, as you'll call to mind,
From every joy in life debarred,
All pleasure being left behind,
To her I leave my heart enshrined,
Pale, piteous, shrivelled up and thin ;
It perished by her deeds unkind,
May God forgive her this her sin !

XI.

And *Ythier Marchant* shall get,
Joint heir with *Master Cuckold John*,
To both of whom I'm much in debt,
My trenchant sword of steel ; undrawn,
Because, by chance, it lies in pawn
For some small trifle, which when paid,
I order that mine host anon
Shall hand them back the trusty blade.

XII.

Item, the *White Horse* tavern sign
To *Saint Amant* and *Mule* as well.
Blaru, that diamond of mine
And baulking *Ass with Brindled Fell*.
The bull, whose opening letters spell
Omnis utriusque sexus,
That with the Carmelites played hell,
To parish priests for present use.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT

XIII.

To *Jehan Trouvé*, the butcher chap,
A sheep that's young and fat be brought,
Thereto a feather whisk to flap
The flies that taint his ox unbought
Or cow; and when the villain's caught
Who lifts her by the neck to thieve her,
Let him receive a collar taut
And perish of a gallows fever.

XIV.

To *Master Robert Vallée* now,
A clerk of Parliament, sans riches,
No hill or dale is his I trow.
He'll have a noble keepsake, which is
A special pair of under breeches,
That also lie in pawn, the stuff
To make a hood, with darns and stitches,
For *Jehanneton*, his bit of fluff.

XV.

Because he holds a decent post
He needs more pay, and might be led
Entirely by the Holy Ghost,
Because a trifle cracked, 'tis said;
The "Art of Memory" be read
To cure him, taken from Tom Fool;
For no more wisdom's in his head
Than lies within a wooden stool.

XVI.

And furthermore, I will bestow
Said *Robert's* livelihood, and tell,
(No need to let your envy grow !)
You friends of mine, that you must sell
My hauberk, spend the money well,
Some house near St. Jacques' steeple seek,
Wherein this popinjay may dwell
And copy deeds all Easter Week.

XVII.

To friend *Jacques Cardon* my bequest
Both absolute is and profuse :
To wit, my gloves and silken vest ;
With willow acorns for his use,
And, every day, a fatted goose,
A capon bursting through its skin,
Ten tots of milk-white vineyard juice,
And lawsuits two, to keep him thin.

XVIII.

René de Montigny, three hounds,
As nobly born, I dedicate ;
And *Jehan Raguyer* shall have three pounds
As charge upon my whole estate ;
Yet stay ! I can't anticipate
How rich I may become ere long :
To friends be too considerate
And rob my heirs, were surely wrong.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT

XIX.

Item, I leave my lord of *Grigny*
Bicêtre in need of overhauling,
And six hounds more than to *Montigny*,
With *Nygon* tower that's near to falling ;
And to that bastard caterwauling,
Mouton, who summonses his betters,
I fain would give a proper mauling
And place for slumber, bound in fetters.

XX.

To *James Raguyer* the *Popin* Fountain,
With chickens and blancmange and brill,
In short, of food a very mountain ;
A rabbit cooked with choicest skill,
The *Fir-Cone* cellar at his will
To ope and shut, with feet to fire
And hooded gown to guard from chill ;
And tartlets too, should he desire.

XXI.

To *Master Jehan Mautaint* and *Peter*
Bassenier, for jointly sharing,
The Provoſt's favour, none is fleeter
To fine and punish without sparing ;
To *Proctor Fournier* for his wearing
Light caps and shoes with toes embossed,
All of my cobbler's own preparing,
Meet fashion for this time of froſt.

XXII.

Item, the Captain of the Guard
Shall with the *Helmet* be bedight ;
His men who keep their watch and ward
And stumble over stalls at night,
I leave to them the *Lantern's* light
And rubies two ; they are requested
With their best dungeon to requite
The donor, if he be arrested.

XXIII.

To *Perrenet Marchant* I give,
The *Bastard de la Barre* renowned,
(No better dealer e'er did live)
Of straw three trusses, sweet and sound,
To spread as mattress on the ground
His amorous calling to pursue,
Whereby his living must be found,
The only trade he ever knew.

XXIV.

Then to the *Wolf* and *Chollet* falls
As legacy the ducklings which
Are snatched at dusk, beneath the walls,
As is their custom, from a ditch ;
A mantle long and wide to hitch
About their prey, nor aught disclose,
Wood, charcoal, pea and gammon-flitch,
And my old waders lacking toes.

XXV.

I leave, in pity of their cases,
To three young boys by Fate derided,
All mentioned in their proper places,
Three orphans wholly unprovided,
All barefoot, all three hollow-sided,
And wormlike naked altogether,
My order is that they be tided
At least o'er all this wintry weather.

XXVI.

Colin Laurens the first, the others
Girart Goussouyn and *Jehan Marceau*,
Devoid of goods and sires and mothers,
To each, who is not worth a row
Of pins, a slice of land shall go,
Or nimble fourpence paid in gold.
Good eating all these boys will know
In time to come, when I've grown old.

XXVII.

I here surrender and resign,
Two clerks from poverty to free,
Those high collegiate rights of mine,
The claim to be a nominee
Acquired on taking my degree ;
Their names are here below included :
'Tis Charity that works in me
And Nature, seeing them denuded.

XXVIII.

They're *Guillaume Cotin*, I declare,
And *Thibault de Vitry*, for each
Is Latin scholar, poor and bare,
Not quarrelsome, of peaceful speech,
And fit in any church to preach.
For *Guillot Gueuldry's* house-rent yet
Incontinent their hands shall reach,
While waiting something more to get.

XXIX.

St. Antoine's Cross that all may view,
The tavern sign that hangs so plain,
I leave them too, with billiard cue
And daily draughts from out the *Seine* :
To those poor pigeons laws constrain
In cages barred to spend their life,
My mirror bright without a stain,
And favours from the gaoler's wife.

XXX.

Item, I leave the hospitals
My windows hung with cobweb-stuff ;
To outcasts under butchers' stalls,
To each of them a hearty cuff,
To tremble at a visage gruff,
To go unshaven, starve and shiver,
Coat tattered, breeches scant enough,
Pinched, frozen, wet as any river.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT

XXXI.

My barber shall have this concession,
The shreds and clippings of my hair,
The whole in undisturbed possession ;
My cobbler, shoes that need repair ;
The ragman, clothes with many a tear ;
And they shall have the residue
Of things that I have ceased to wear
For less than what they cost when new.

XXXII.

Item, I leave the begging friars
And nuns and tenders of the shrines,
All dainties that a man desires,
Flawns, capons and fat jellied chines ;
Then let them preach the Fifteen Signs,
And keep on piling up the platter.
The *Carmelites* make concubines
Of our friends' wives, which doesn't matter.

XXXIII.

Jehan de la Garde, who's spiced too much,
The *Golden Mortar* sign shall claim,
From *St. Mor* church a votive crutch
To crush his mustard in the same.
But he who plays the lawyers' game
And threatens to begin a suit,
Saint Anthony set him aflame !
That's my bequest to him, the brute !

XXXIV.

To *Merebeuf* be handed down
And *Nicolas de Louviers* old,
An eggshell stuffed with many a crown
And franc, as full as it will hold.
While to the *Gonvieux* porter bold,
Pierre Rousseville, without delay,
A larger sum of cash in gold,
Such crowns as princes give away.

XXXV.

At last, while sitting at my writing
To-night, alone, in humour prime,
This lay composing and enditing,
I heard the *Sorbonne* belfry chime
At nine o'clock, its proper time,
The Angelus rang through the air;
And so an end was made, for I'm
Accustomed then to say a prayer.

XXXVI.

Thereat, I fell into a doze,
But not from wine I swear to you,
My wits went wandering I suppose;
I saw Dame Memory review
Her shelves, collect in order due
Concurrent mental operations,
Opinions either false or true,
And other psychic ideations.

XXXVII.

Thereto our estimative motions,
Whereby prosperity we gain,
Cognition and conceptive notions,
Whence, when disturbed, arises plain
A like disorder in the brain
And, monthly, men demented grow ;
I read it, and the sense retain,
In *Aristotle* long ago.

XXXVIII.

My sensifacient system drove
The loom Imagination plied
Which divers paradoxes wove,
My sovereign part was quite defied,
Suspended, even might have died,
Forgetful of all moods and tenses,
While I in Schoolmen's jargon tried
To prove th'alliance of the senses.

XXXIX.

Since now my senses were at rest
And I had found the matter out,
I thought to finish my bequest ;
My ink was frozen round about,
The wind had blown my candle out,
There was no fire to light it at,
So wrapped up in my mantle stout
I fell asleep, and that was that.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

XL.

By *Francis Villon*, name renowned,
On date aforesaid made and writ,
No figs or dates with him abound.
Of all his chattels not one whit,
Though black as scrubbing-brush with grit,
But for some special friend is meant ;
Some coppers make his only bit
Of cash, and they will soon be spent.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT
OF
MASTER FRANCIS VILLON.
Written in 1461.

*Here beginneth
the Great Testament
of Master Francis Villon.*

I.

NOT wholly fool nor wise man quite
I've come to this my thirtieth year
And drunk up all my shame outright,
In spite of many pains severe
Thibault D'Aussigny, as is clear,
Inflicted on me of design ;
Although a spiritual peer
He certainly is none of mine.

II.

As lord or bishop he from me ;
Shall neither faith nor homage find ;
No land of his I hold in fee ;
And I am not his hart or hind.
A summer's tide on crusts I pined
And water cold by his decree.
He starved me sorely, harsh or kind
God be to him as he to me.

III.

Though some may deem these things absurd
And say here sounds a sland'rous tone,
Indeed, I speak no lying word
And all abusive aims disown.
I wish him this mischance alone :
May Jesus from His heavenly seat
If mercy unto me was shown
To him an equal measure mete.

IV.

If he was harsh and hard to me
Yet more than I do here unfold,
God's own affair then let it be
To pay the debt incurred of old.
But since our Mother Church doth hold
Us bound to pray for all our foes :
That I am wrong then be it told ;
Of all this coil let God dispose.

V.

Now, by the soul which late did part
From good *Cotard*, for him I'll pray !
But stay, this must be learnt by heart,
For reading irks me every way.
I'll say it as the *Picards* say.
Who knows it not may list and learn,
And so it may some later day
At *Lille* or *Douai* serve his turn.

VI.

Thus, if that prelate claims this aid,
By my baptismal faith I swear
To heaven there shall be conveyed
A secret, unreluctant prayer.
My psalter, I shall find it there,
(Not leather-bound but none the worse) . . .
The *Deus Laudem* will declare
My feelings in the seventh verse.

VII.

So I the Son of God implore
That my poor prayers may make their ways
To Him who heard my plaints before ;
Who mixed a spirit with my clays,
Who saved me, too, from great dismays
And sent to me deliverance ;
His and Our Lady's be the praise
And *Louis'* ; our good king of France.

VIII.

To whom may God give *Jacob's* dower,
The glory and the honour sure
Of *Solomon* ; in point of power
He lacks not, nor for courage pure.
To keep his memory secure
While earth pursues her wonted ways
May our good monarch's reign endure
Methuselah's full span of days.

IX.

And grant his eyes may yet behold
A dozen royal children first,
Like *Charlemagne* both brave and bold
And good as was *Saint Martin* erst ;
All males, at queenly bosom nursed.
Like joys the *Dauphin* too attend ;
Of destined ills be these the worst,
Then *Paradise* to make an end.

X.

But now since I am feeble grown,
With more of health than fortune spent,
And while I yet can call my own
The little sense that heaven lent,
To borrow more was not my bent,
My last will I have here expressed
In this my stablished testament,
And hereby do revoke the rest.

XI.

I write in sixty-one, the year
Our noble king delivered me
From *Meung* and its harsh prison cheer
And life restored with liberty,
To whom in all humility,
While life blood warms my being's core
Or his, I'll bend a duteous knee,
Recalling benefits of yore.

XII.

The truth is many a sigh and moan
Were uttered, many a tear was shed,
And toils and griefs became my own,
And pains were on my pathway spread,
Before these very sorrows led
My dullish mind to wisdom's light
And brought more gain than all I read
In comment on the *Stagyrite*.

XIII.

But *God* who cheered the pilgrim's plight
At *Emmaus*, as the gospels say,
Just as my sorrow reached the height,
A waif without a plack to pay,
Did lead where this good city lay,
And gave me hope ; my vile offence
So utterly was washed away
In *Heaven's* sight by penitence.

XIV.

A sinner I, as well is known ;
Yet *God* doth not my death ordain
If heart and life be better grown ;
And all whose sins did on them gain
Who be of better living fain
He sees with pity ; mercy then,
When conscience brings remorseful pain,
Assoils the souls of sinful men.

XV.

Go read in famed romance's page
The faith of him who sang the *Rose* :
That ripened folk grown old and sage
Should find excuses pat for those
Mad hearts of youth where wisdom's snows
Yet never fell. Alack, 'tis truth !
But they who be my fiercest foes
Don't wish me to outlive my youth.

XVI.

Yet, if the world were bettered by
My death or story left untold,
I would condemn myself to die
For misdemeanours manifold :
I bring no harm to young or old
Alive or dead, in either case :
A man so needy never rolled
A mountain from its resting place.

XVII.

One day in *Alexander's* reign
A certain *Diomede*, 'tis said,
Was brought before the king, a chain
Enfettered him from heels to head
In felon guise ; for he had led
A pirate's life upon the sea ;
So came before the monarch dread
To hear the certain death decree.

XVIII.

"Why hast thou," came the query stern,
"Presumed to be a thief at sea?"
The other quickly made return:
"Why am I called a thief by thee?
Because I lived by piracy
With one small, feeble ship alone?
An emperor I now would be
Had I had armies like thine own.

XIX.

"But what's the odds? My fortune now
Has made me thus unfortunate.
Before its power I needs must bow
Accepting what was sent of fate.
Excuses are but idle prate,
But listen how the proverb goes:
When man's necessity is great
Small liking for the law he shows."

XX.

The king when he had made an end
Replied at once to *Diomed*:
"Thy fortunes shall be altered, friend,
From evil; I will help thy need."
"Twas done: the pirate, as we read,
Thenceforth paid everyone his due.
What goes before, in very deed,
The great *Valerius* tells as true.

XXI.

Had *Heaven* in my great distress
A pitying *Alexander* sent
To bring me into happiness
And had my life been still misspent,
For such a sinner's punishment
To burn to ashes were too good !
'Tis need drives men to devilment
And hunger wolves to leave the wood.

XXII.

How I regret my time of *May*,
My days of riot, now no more,
That unperceived stole away
Till age was knocking at the door.
No sluggard foot nor charger bore
Them off. How then ? As quick as thought
On eagle wings away did soar
My youth, and I am left with nought.

XXIII.

Yes, it is gone, and I remain
Right poor of learning and of sense,
But rotted fruit and blighted grain ;
Devoid of power, or place, or pence ;
And object of the most intense
Dislike from every relative.
The humblest even takes offence
Because I lack the means to live.

XXIV.

No spendthrift I of an estate
On banquets or in bawdy gear ;
With loving at too fast a rate
They cannot blame me justly here,
Except that others paid too dear.
I tell the truth and nothing less,
And speak this boast with conscience clear ;
Who did no wrong need not confess.

XXV.

In truth I've played the lover's part,
And fain would play it all my days ;
But find a very heavy heart
And famished belly stop my craze
To wander in such amorous ways.
Well, let him thrive by my mischance
Whose ribs are lined with rich relays :
The bigger belt the better dance.

XXVI.

Had I but studied hard, in truth,
When I was young, nor played the fool,
But been a very virtuous youth,
I'd have a house and lie in wool.
But ah ! I ran away from school,
A way that naughty children take.
The words are written ; with the dule
Indeed my heart is like to break.

XXVII.

Alack, I took the *Preacher's* voice
To speak a most congenial truth
In that remembered text : " Rejoice,
My son, rejoice in this thy youth ! "
But now another dish, forsooth,
He serves my riper years, ah me !
Declaring in his speech uncouth,
" Yea, youth and all are vanity ! "

XXVIII.

My life has fled more swiftly than
A weaver's shuttle in the gloom,
As *Job* says, when the careful man
With burning straw lights up the room,
And, finding nothing on the loom,
Amiss, in mirk works on apace :
And I, I fear no future doom,
For death erases all disgrace.

XXIX.

Where is that graceful, gallant throng
Whose steps I followed in of yore,
So smooth of speech, so sweet in song,
With pleasant pranks and prate galore ?
Ah, some of them are here no more,
But stiff and dead recline in clay ;
For them be *Paradise* in store,
And *God* preserve the rest, I pray.

XXX.

And some, praise *God*, have posts of trust
As lords and masters ; some again
Go bare and never see a crust
But through the baker's window-pane ;
Carthusian habits some maintain ;
Or neath the Benedictine rule
In fishwives' footgear tramp the lane.
So wags the world with all the school.

XXXI.

To give all men of worth repose
And peace is surely *God's* own debt,
Which paid, he nothing further owes ;
And mum's the word for what they get.
But to the poor with nought as yet
God grant the patience that endures ;
Those others have no cause to fret,
Replete and rich in sinecures.

XXXII.

Good wine have they and noble roasts,
Fish, sauces spiced that flavour lend,
Tarts, custard, eggs served up on toasts,
Poached, fried, all manners without end.
Not like the masons do they spend
Long weary years in heavy labours ;
Nor flunkeys need the glass to tend,
Each fills his own and then his neighbour's.

XXXIII.

But this digression has to do
With present matters not a whit.
No judge am I to sift them through,
Or to condemn or to acquit.
Indeed, imperfect every bit
Am I ; may *Jesu* healing send !
Let them be satisfied with it !
What I have penned, sirs, I have penned.

XXXIV.

But let the cloister sleep in peace
And speak of things in cheerier vein.
'Tis time for discontent to cease
Her song in this unpleasing strain.
Sad poverty will still complain
Aloud, and yet was never taught
From biting speeches to refrain ;
If mute from fear, rebels in thought.

XXXV.

I met with poverty from birth,
Begotten poor, of humble race ;
Among the great ones of the earth
Nor sire nor grandsire claimed a place.
Want followed after us apace.
Upon the tombstones of my line,
Whose souls may *God* receive in grace,
No kingly crowns or sceptres shine.

XXXVI.

Lamenting at this needy state
 My heart betimes rejoins to me :
 " Oh mortal, grumble not at fate
 And sorrow not at what must be.
 If *Jacques Coeur* held more in fee,
 Yet better live in mean array
 Than lie with those of high degree
 That under costly tombs decay."

XXXVII.

" Of high degree ! " What have I said ?
 In vain this high degree they wore.
 What says the *Psalmist* ? They are fled
 Their place shall know of them no more.
 No will have I, a sinner sore,
 With death to meddle in the least :
 Be that to clerics handed o'er,
 For 'tis the office of the priest.

XXXVIII.

No son am I of angel bright
 Who bears a starry aureole
 Or other diadem of light.
 My sire is dead, God rest his soul,
 His bones are neath a tombstone's scroll . .
 My mother, too, will die I know,
 Poor thing, the bell must also toll
 For her ; and then the son will go.

XXXIX.

'Tis fated death shall be the rule
For poor and rich and low and high,
For priest or layman, sage or fool,
Fat, lean, tall, short, they all must die ;
Yea, beauty no reprieve can buy ;
And dames, both fair and foul, whose ruffs
In lofty braidings swept the sky
Must leave those costly padded stuffs.

XL.

To *Paris* and his *Helen* death
Brought anguish, as to every one.
He who suspires his latest breath
Must taste the gall his heart would shun ;
God, how the sweats of terror run !
And nothing can the pain commute,
For brothers, sisters, children, none
Would answer as his substitute.

XLI.

The nostrils curl, the fingers clutch,
The hands are cold and moist as clay,
The flesh is clammy to the touch,
Death shakes the form, the face grows grey.
Must woman's tender shape decay,
So soft, so smooth, a precious prize,
And wait such evil ending ? Yea,
Unless in life she scales the skies.

*Ballade
of the
Ladies of Byegone Times.*

WHAT land afar, ah tell me where,
Doth *Flora*, *Rome's* delight, retain,
Archipiade, or *Thais*, ne'er
Were cousins a more lovesome twain ;
Or Echo, answering again
Where mere lies still or river flows,
Whose beauty knew no human stain ?
But where, ah where be last year's snows ?

Where's *Eloise*, of wisdom rare,
Whose passion brought her lover pain ?
For gelding *Abelard* must bear
And then in cloister monk remain.
And where the queen who did ordain
A sack should *Buridan* enclose
Before they dropped him in the *Seine* ?
But where, ah where be last year's snows ?

Queen Blanche, as lily pure and fair,
In voice so siren-sweet of strain,
With *Bistris*, *Bertha* debonair,
Alicia, *Eremburge* of *Maine*,
And *Joan*, the valour of *Lorraine*,
At *Rouen* burnt by English foes ;
Where, Lady Blest, be all the train ?
But where, ah where be last year's snows ?

Prince, all enquiry will be vain
Of weeks or years where they repose ;
No answer comes but this refrain :
But where, ah where be last year's snows ?

*Ballade
of the
Lords of Byegone Times.*

IN PURSUANCE OF THE FORMER THEME.

WHERE is the third *Calixtus*, late
Deceased the bearer of the name,
Who held four years the papal state?
The king of Arragonian fame;
The *Duke of Bourbon*, void of blame;
Duke Arthur of the Breton hold;
The seventh *Charles* whom all acclaim?
But where is *Charlemagne* the bold?

Likewise the king of *Scots*, whose fate
Did half his face in spiteful game
As red as amethyst create,
From chin to forehead glowed the maim?
The great king that from *Cyprus* came;
Or that good Spanish king, unfold
His name I cannot, to my shame?
But where is *Charlemagne* the bold?

So further prattle I abate,
For all conclusions must be lame.
Death gains the day at any rate
And none can hope his rage to tame.
Yet but one question more I'll frame:
Bohemian *Ladislav* enrolled
A king, where's he, or his grand-dame?
But where is *Charlemagne* the bold?

Where's *Breton Clauquin's* patriot flame,
The *Asvergne* dauphin, or the old
Alençon duke? The tale's the same:
But where is *Charlemagne* the bold?

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Ballade
on the Same Theme.

BUT where is every holy priest
Whom alb and amice did array
And sacred stole, whose strength increased
To grip the devil's neck, they say,
Red-hot with evil plans, perfay ?
For death both sons and servants find ;
Their life is now blown out for aye :
And all that's left is merely wind !

Where be the rulers of the east,
The golden-handed emperors, pray ;
Or *France's* monarchs, not the least
Of kings, o'er others bearing sway,
Who did for church and convent pay
To worship *God* with pious mind ?
They once were honoured in their day :
And all that's left is merely wind.

Why hath the stout, wise *Dauphin* ceased
At *Vienne* or *Grenoble* to stay ?
Where be the lords that used to feast
At *Dijon*, *Dolles* or *Sallins* way ?
Their pursuivants, their trumpets gay
And heralds are they left behind ?
With dainty fare they filled their clay :
And all that's left is merely wind.

Princes must meet with death's decay
And every man of human kind ;
Some ruled while others did obey :
And all that's left is merely wind.

XLII.

So *Popes* and *Kings* and *Princes* brave
Conceived within a queenly womb
Must seek the narrow, silent grave,
While new successors fill their room.
I, shall I then escape the doom,
At *Rennes* a needy peddler known?
God knows I shall not dread the tomb
When all my merry times are flown.

XLIII.

This world will not go on for ever,
Though wealthy grab-alls think it ought;
The fatal shears all lives dis sever.
So thence some comfort may be taught
To one grown old and owning nought,
Whose tongue, when youthful, led the school
Of wits, whose railing now is thought
The prate of whoremonger and fool.

XLIV.

For now he needs must beg his bread;
The thought of death both day and night
Beside him stalks, a shape of dread;
Life offers him no more delight.
So, but for fear of *God*, he might
Be led to do a horrid deed.
Yea, some there be, in *God's* despite,
Despair to suicide did lead.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

XLV.

For, though he were a pleasant lad,
An old buffoon appears a pest,
The younger people scorn his sad
Grimaces and the threadbare jest.
When taciturn to please the rest
They deem the fool dumbfoundered found ;
But when he speaks they swear with zest
That empty vessels make most sound.

XLVI.

These women too of tarnished fames,
Grown old, in poor and wretched state,
Beholding younger, pampered dames,
Who still can charm and captivate,
Demand why *God* decreed their date
Of birth so soon, for they've grown old.
God holds his peace : for in debate
He could not match a female scold.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

*The Regrets of the Fair Armouress
at Having Grown Old.*

METHOUGHT I heard in great distress
That ancient woman thus complain
Who was the beauteous armouress
And wish herself a girl again :
“ Ah age, so fell, whom all disdain,
Why hast thou conquered me so soon ?
What hinders me to strike amain
And find the stroke of death a boon ?

“ The right to rule thou hast removed,
Rare beauty's dower to make men mad,
On merchants, clerks and clergy proved.
No man alive but then was glad
To give me freely all he had,
Whate'er repentance followed after,
So that I granted to the lad
What beggars now refuse with laughter.

“ To many a man I did deny
The same, (great folly you'll agree),
Through fancying a lover sly
Who had full many gifts from me.
Whoever else might cheated be
I loved him well, if truth be told,
But still his ways were rude to see,
He loved me only for my gold.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

“Although he spurned and dragged me round,
I loved him, yea, would for his sake
Have gathered faggots from the ground ;
When he but sought one kiss to take
I soon forgot all grief and ache ;
The rake but needed to begin
To hug me . . So I gained my stake.
What’s left me now ? But shame and sin.

“Well, he is dead gone thirty year
And I still live, old, white with care.
Ah when I think of byegone cheer,
My then estate with this compare,
When I behold myself all bare
And see myself transmuted quite,
All withered, wrinkled, lean and spare,
I almost do grow mad outright.

“Where be they now ? the forehead fair,
The eyebrows arched, the hair so bright,
Large pupils and look debonair
That captured the most crafty wight ;
The shapely nose of size aright ;
The ears close clinging to the head ;
The dimpled chin, skin clear and white,
And lovely lips of rosy red !

FRANÇOIS VILLON

“Straight shoulders, arms both slim and long
With little hands and slender wrists,
Small nipples, haunches plump and strong,
High, smooth, where every charm assists
To make them meet for amorous lists ;
Wide loins, fat thighs, and therein set,
Like love concealed amid the twists
Of silken curls, that amulet !

“The forehead wrinkled, ringlets gray,
The eyebrows hairless, dim the eyes
That smiled so saucily and gay
Entrancing men of merchandise,
The nose a hook whence beauty flies ;
Ears limp, and mossy-like their skin ;
The face pale, dead, in faded guise ;
Lips coarse and swollen ; shrunk chin ;

“Thus human beauty ends its dream !
Stiff arms, and hands all claw-wise bent,
The shoulders fit for hunchback seem ;
The breasts, they're withered now and spent ;
The haunches shrunk a like extent.
The amulet, bah ! As for thighs,
They are but bags of discontent
And flecked like sausages by flies.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

“Thus we the past good times regret
In company, each poor old trot !
Heaped close, as tennis balls are set,
Upon our hunkers, as we squat
Around a wretched fire, God wot,
Soon kindled and soon burnt away ;
Yet we were once a dainty lot ! . . .
So time makes men and women pay.”

*Ballade
of the Fair Armourress
to all Gay Girls.*

NOW think of it, gay glover's maid,
Who used to be my pupil fair,
And you, *Blanche* of the slipper trade,
Of changing times and loves beware.
Take right and left, and do not spare,
I prithee, any man you see :
For age your value will impair,
Like coin cried down you then will be.

And you, sweet sausage-seller's aid,
Whose dancing is so debonair ;
Costumier's *Guillemette*, you jade,
To flout your master do not dare ;
To shut up shop you must prepare
When old and loathsome like to me :
All service priests grown old forswear ;
Like coin cried down you then will be.

Hood-setting *Joan*, be much afraid,
Lest trouble catch you in a snare ;
Purse-bearing *Katherine*, get paid,
Nor chase the lovers from your stair ;
An ugly woman ne'er can share
Their boons, or from their jeers be free
And hideous age of love is bare,
Like coin cried down you then will be.

Girls, why I weep and rend my hair,
Just listen and you will agree :
No cure is known of anywhere,
Like coin cried down we all must be.

XLVII.

The good and fair who lived on earth
Aforetime teach this lesson terse,
So let it pass for what it's worth.
I've had it registered in verse
By *Fremm*, no one blunders worse,
Yet sober after my own mark . . .
If he denies it, how I'll curse !
For as the master so the clerk.

XLVIII.

The danger now is plain to see
How lovers purchase love too dear.
But some, be sure, will disagree
With this remark and say : " Give ear !
If love perverse and bad 'appear
These cheating women were to blame ;
Thy sentence, sir, is too severe,
For they are known of evil fame.

XLIX.

" For if they only love for gold
A loving hour is all they reap.
To all the world their charms are sold
With laughter when the purses weep ;
And none need sell her love wares cheap.
And every man who walks the sod
With dames of good repute should keep,
And shun the rest, so help me *God* ! "

L.

But, faith, no pleading of the sort
Will pass for valid in my sight.
'Tis very easy to retort,
Provided I have heard aright
That we should love but virtue bright.
The question is, if those poor dears
I've sung at length were never white
And pure of soul in byegone years?

LI.

Aye, white and pure of soul were they,
And once without reproach or blame.
To every one there came a day,
Before she won her evil fame,
When love selected for the dame
A student, monk, or gentle squire
To quench of love the fiercer flame
Than is *Saint Anthony* his fire.

LII.

They only followed the decree
Of *Nature*, as is plainly shown :
And took their joys in secrecy
For those were shared by two alone.
But loves like these will droop full-blown ;
They tire ; they part ; the song is done :
And she, who yet but one had known,
Loves better to love everyone.

LIII.

What moves them to it? 'Tis my creed,
(To speak no scandal of the fair)
That women when they love indeed
Wish all mankind to have a share.
(No other rhyme would suit me there !)
Besides all *Rheims* and *Troyes* agree
Backed up by *Lille* and *St. Omer*,
Six workmen do much more than three.

LIV.

Well, fools must strike on the rebound,
While ladies volley in the air ;
Collecting dues *Love* roams around ;
All *Faith* is violated there,
Be hugs and kisses ne'er so rare.
Join hounds, arms, hawks and lovers' gains,
For all, at last, make mortals swear :
"For one short joy a thousand pains !"

*Double Ballade
on the Same Theme.*

NOW love on to your heart's desire,
And go where feast and mob incite,
In the end nought better you'll acquire
Than heads well hammered in a fight :
Mad love makes fools of every wight :
Did *Solomon* to idols lead :
And *Samson's* peepers robbed of light . . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

Sweet fiddling *Orpheus* who the lyre
And flute and bagpipe played aright
Through love ran danger from the dire
Dog *Cerberus'* three-headed bite ;
Narcissus, too, of beauty bright
Was drowned in deep, dark well for greed
Of his own loveliness in sight . . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

Sardana, too, it did inspire,
When *Crete* was won by that good knight,
To dress himself in girl's attire
And be a virgin spinner hight.
King David lost *God's* favour quite
Although a prophet wise, we read,
Through seeing thighs washed plump and white . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

The same set *Ammon's* lust afire
His sister *Thamar* once by might
To ravish, feigning to require
Some tarts to eat, a foul despite ;
And *Herod* (no vain tales I write)
John Baptist from his headpiece freed
Songs, leaps and dances to require . . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

So I, poor wretch, received my hire
Like clouts in stream no beating slight,
All naked, think me not a liar.
Who to such sour fruit did invite
But *Katherine de Vauselles* for spite ?
And with a third was *Noë* fee'd.
Such gloves suit such a nuptial rite . . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

Well, shall young fellows shun the choir
Of sweet young girls for very fright ?
No, e'en if burnt upon a pyre
Like those who broomsticks ride by night.
Than civet they're more exquisite :
But fair or dark it is my creed
He's mad who trusts in them a mite . . .
Who misses such is blest indeed.

LV.

Had she, whom I have served of yore
So loyally with all my heart,
For whom much evil grief I bore
And suffered such tormenting smart,
Had she but told me at the start
Her wishes, (Ah my vain regret !)
'Twould not have needed wizard's art
To draw back scatheless from her net.

LVI.

Whatever prattle poured from me
She always was prepared to hear,
Ne'er to concur or disagree ;
Nay more, would let me linger near
Inclining unto me her ear ;
And entertaining as before
Talk flowed like water through a weir :
She suffered it to fool me more.

LVII.

She fooled me well, and made me deem
That that was this and this was that ;
Till flour did very cinders seem ;
A worsted cap became a hat ;
And ever when at dice we sat
Her aces changed to double threes . . .
So I and many another flat
Were made to think that chalk was cheese.

LVIII.

The sky appeared a brazen ball ;
In calfskin clad the clouds would jump ;
The mornings turn to evenings all ;
A turnip be a cabbage stump ;
Raw cider, wine unspoilt by pump ;
The hangman's rope, a silken scabbard ;
A windmill seem a sow's fat rump ;
An abbot's paunch, a herald's tabard.

LIX.

Thus love befooled me and o'erpowered
And blew by turns both hot and cold.
My faith is, any slyboots dowered
With cunning rare as finest gold
Would also have been bought and sold,
Nor had the luck to save his bacon,
But, just like me, this title hold :
" The lover flouted and forsaken ! "

LX.

So, *Love*, in this rebellious mood
By blood and fire be defied !
Death nears me ; she who sent him would
Not care a farthing if I died.
My hurdy-gurdy's laid aside ;
I shall not follow as before
The loves whose badge was all my pride,
Their ranks shall know me nevermore.

LXI.

From such delights I now have flown,
Let those pursue who still are fain,
Henceforth I'll leave this theme alone
And follow my own will again.
Should some ask how I dare complain
Of love, let this my answer be :
" A dying man need not refrain ;
He has a charter to speak free."

LXII.

'Tis very plain the graveyard calls ;
I spit, and from my mouth are thrown
Great gobs of white as big as balls ;
What's more to tell ? And I am grown
Quite useless as a squire to *Joan*,
Who scorns an old exhausted crock . . .
My voice sounds aged in its tone,
Though I should be a gay young cock !

LXIII.

'Twas that cold drink I had to swallow,
God willed it so and *Jacques Thibault*,
Deep underground in dungeon hollow,
And chew thereto the fruits of woe,
In chains . . . When I recall it, lo,
I pray for him *et reliqua*
That *God* may send them . . . so and so,
Just what I think . . . *et cetera* !

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

LXIV.

I wish to him (oh dear me no !)
Or his lieutenant no mishap ;
His henchman neither, who was so
Polite and always in the gap ;
The rest concern me not a rap :
But little *Master Robert* . . . he ?
I love them all, aye every chap,
As *God* does *Jews* from *Lombardy*.

LXV.

If memory is not playing tricks,
On leaving home I chanced to vent
Some rhymes in fourteen fifty-six
That some folk, maugre my dissent,
Are pleased to call my *Testament* ;
Their pleasure 'tis, and theirs alone :
Yet why should I be discontent ?
No man is master of his own.

LXVI.

Whoever has not had, I say,
The legacy I left him first
Must find my heirs some future day
And dun them after I'm enhearsed.
Who those may be ? Well, hear the worst :
Turgis, Provins, Robin, Moreau ;
By whom my goods will be disbursed
To this my very bed of woe.

LXVII.

No revocation I decree
Although my lands were all at stake,
My pity has not chilled towards thee,
Poor bastard *De la Barre*, so take
Three wisps of straw and mats to make,
Though old, a covering for thy shins ;
Thus warmly gaitered cease to shake,
And stand up boldly on thy pins.

LXVIII.

In brief, I'll say but one more word
Before enditing this my will
To *Fremín*, who, as clerk, has heard
Me here protest, (if he is still
Awake) that I desire no ill
To anyone in this bequest ;
Nor shall its terms be published till
In *France* they are made manifest.

LXIX.

My heart grows weak and weaker still ;
The power to draw my breath has fled.
Come, *Fremín*, paper, ink and quill,
And take thy seat beside my bed
To keep away the spies I dread ;
And write down quickly my intent,
Then copy all therein is said :
And here begins my testament.

Here

Villon beginneth his devises.

LXX.

Of *God* the *Father* in the name,
And *Son* conceived of *Virgin* sweet,
The *Godhead's* co-eternal flame
Together with the *Paraclete*,
Who keep in heaven a retreat
For souls by *Adam's* trespass flawed ;
Who holds this faith will gain his seat
Where death makes many a demigod.

LXXI.

Their souls and bodies both were dead
And damned moreover in addition ;
The bodies rotten, spirits sped
To flames, whatever their contrition ;
But not a prophet found admission
Or patriarch, my faith declares,
Because I have a shrewd suspicion
Heat never tortured loins like theirs.

LXXII.

Should some one say : " How canst thou be
Cocksure of matters in debate
With no divinity degree ?
Unwise presumption fills thy pate ! "
Christ's parable doth demonstrate
How *Dives* had no bed of down
When dead, but met a fiery fate,
And *Lazarus* a heavenly crown.

LXXIII.

His finger was not seen aglow,
Or *Dives* had not sought the grace
That finger-tip should there bestow
A single drop to cool his face.
There sots will be in sorry case
Who swill both coat and shirt as well.
Since drink is dear in such a place
God keep us from the clutch of hell.

LXXIV.

In name of *God*, as was designed,
And in our *Blessed Lady's* name,
May I, though lean yet sound in mind,
Complete this writing void of blame ;
That not a touch of fever came
I thank *God's* clemency of heart ;
Of other grief and bitter shame
I'll say no more, but make a start :

LXXV.

First, to the holy *Three-in-One*
I do bequeath my wretched soul,
And to *Our Lady's* benison
Commend, in hope she may condole :
The charity, too, of the whole
Nine worthy *Orders* I entreat,
That they may bear it to its goal
Before the precious Mercy-seat.

LXXVI.

Item, my body's carrion
 I leave to our great mother *Earth* ;
 The worms will not wax fat thereon,
 For famine has reduced my girth.
 Make haste : from dust it drew its birth
 And unto dust it shall return.
 Each thing its proper place with mirth
 Regaineth, as the wise discern.

LXXVII.

Item, to *Guillaume Villon* . . . be
 He more than foster-father styled . . .
 Who ever kinder proved to me
 Than mother to her swaddling child.
 My bygone sorrows he beguiled,
 And grieves about my present state ;
 I beg him to grow reconciled
 And cease to be disconsolate.

LXXVIII.

I leave him all the books I boast
 And that romance "*The Devil's Puff*,"
 Which *Guy de Tabarie* engrossed,
 A fellow of the proper stuff !
 Though written in a style that's rough,
 And tossed in sheets beneath the table,
 The theme is notable enough
 To lend some value to the fable.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

LXXIX.

Item, I leave my mother dear,
Who suffered from my evil ways
God knows, the song ensuing here
Wherewith to give *Our Lady* praise ;
Whose help is sent without delays
To soul and body ; well I wot
To find none better all my days,
Nor will my mother, poor old trot.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

*Ballade
that Villon Made
at the Request of His Mother
to Invoke Our Lady.*

LADY of heaven, Queen of earth below,
And Empress of the dread infernal shore,
Receive me your most humble Christian, so
That I with the elect may you adore,
Although I ne'er was worthy heretofore.
Your bounties, oh my Lady and my Queen,
Are greater far than all my sins have been ;
No souls without this bounty merit buy
Or heaven have, no quibbling here I mean.
And in this faith I wish to live and die.

Say to your Son I'm His for weal or woe ;
Through him be cancelled my offences sore :
As pardoned was *Saint Mary* long ago,
Or clerk *Theophilus*, absolved of yore
And freed from debt, you did to grace restore,
Though pact was made him and the fiend between.
'Twixt me and all such doings intervene,
Oh Virgin, in whose spotless breast did lie
The sacrament that at the mass is seen.
And in this faith I wish to live and die.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

A woman old and poor I nothing know,
Unlearned, and ne'er on printed page did pore,
But at my parish church I see the show
Of heaven, with lutes and harps all painted o'er,
And hell where damned souls flame for evermore :
This frights me, that gives joy and pleasure keen.
Grant, *Goddess* high, such joys I too may glean,
Oh you to whom all sinful folk must fly
With faith endowed, of sloth and feigning clean.
And in this faith I wish to live and die.

Virgin and Princess rare, you bore I ween
I *asus* who rules for aye each earthly scene.
Lord of all power He took our human screen,
Like man to help us came from heaven high ;
Offered to death in beauteous youthful mien ;
No lord but Him, on no one else I lean.
And in this faith I wish to live and die.

LXXX.

Item, to my beloved *Rose*
 Nor spleen nor heart of mine shall go :
 She craves for something else than those,
 Though heaps of money she can show :
 For what? A silken purse or so
 Both wide and deep and filled with crowns.
 But I'll be hanged if I bestow
 On her by will my bobs or browns.

LXXXI.

Indeed she does not need my stuff.
 In no such way my thoughts aspire ;
 Of joys with her I've had enough ;
 No longer is my tail afire.
 Of *Michault's* heirs she may enquire
 In life as *Jolly Roger* known.
 A prayer and leap would please this sire
 At *Saint Satur* beneath his stone.

LXXXII.

Yet none the less to pay my debt
 To Love, not to the merry maid,
 (For that same damsel never yet
 A spark of love to me conveyed :
 If all the rest alike were paid
 I know not, nor do greatly care ;
Saint Mary knows when all is said
 There's only stuff for laughter there ;)

FRANÇOIS VILLON

LXXXIII.

This next ballade to her I'll send
Whose rhymes all terminate in R.
Who'll bear it her, and serve my end?
It shall be *Pernet De La Barre*.
And he, when he espies afar
My lady's nose, so snub and scarlet,
Shall shout in the vernacular:
"Whence come you, oh you wanton harlot?"

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Ballade of Villon to His Love.

F alse beauty, costing me so very dear,
R ight harsh in deeds and yet dissembling fair ;
A h love, more sharp of wound than sword or spear.
N o deadlier these, whose name I could declare ;
C harm stained with crime, my heart in twain to tear ;
I ndocile pride, whence many wounded are ;
S pare, eyes so pitiless, your rigour spare ;
A poor man's fortune mend, and never mar.

M y better hap had been to seek, I fear,
A nother's grace, and so escaped this care :
R eflection warned me from her danger sphere ;
T hus I must fly and be of honour bare.
H elp, one and all, help, help in my despair !
A h what ? To die without one blow in war,
S ince pity will not (hard the lot to bear)
A poor man's fortune mend, and never mar.

A time will come that shall turn dry and sere
V ainglorious beauty's blossoms now so rare :
I f still alive, 'twill give me cause to jeer.
L augh ? Ah but no ; 'twould have too mad an air !
L o ! I grown old, while ugliness you wear !
O n ! Drink apace while streams do flow afar,
N or let us all alike this hardship share ;
A poor man's fortune mend, and never mar.

Prince lover, of all loves beyond compare,
M ay nought from your good will me e'er debar ;
B ut every true heart should, by *God* I swear,
A poor man's fortune mend, and never mar.

LXXXIV.

Item, ten lines of verse I've made
To merchant *Ythier* shall belong,
To whom before I left my blade,
(But he must set them in a song);
Thereto a *De profundis* strong
For those he taught to play the whore,
Whose names to mention would be wrong,
Because he'd hate me evermore.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Lay or Rather Rondeau.

DEATH, from thy harshness I appeal
That did away my mistress steal,
Nor yet doth any mercy deal,
But keeps me bound in languor's chain.
No force or strength I may attain ;
What harm then did her life conceal,
Death ?

One heart we had, though we were twain ;
If it be dead, nought may me heal,
Or, if I live, must learn to feel
Like images who know no pain,
Death.

LXXXV.

Item, for *Master Jehan Cornu*
I wish to make another lay ;
Because in needs and business too
He helped me on in every way :
So he shall have the garden gay
Pierre Bourignon conveyed of yore,
With covenant that I should pay
To patch the wall and mend the door.

LXXXVI.

Because it lacked a door I lost
A hone and handle of a hoe.
Eight hawks, not ten, might then have crossed
The ground with ne'er a lark to show.
The house is safe, but bar it so.
A hook as hatchment hung in sight ;
Who stole the sign, a lodging low
I wish him and a bloody night.

LXXXVII.

Item, because the wanton wife
Of *Master Pierre Saint Amant* made
Me come to lead a beggar's life,
(If sin or blame for it be laid
To his account, *God's* pardon's prayed)
For her *White Horse's* sluggish mass
As mate I leave a fitting jade,
The *She-mule* too a red-hot ass.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

LXXXVIII.

Item, to *Denys Hesselin*,
Elect of *Paris*, hogsheads large
Of *Aulnis* wine a full fourteen,
Supplied by *Turgis* at my charge.
Should drink enough to float a barge
His senses drown, then swiftly souse
In water to each barrel's marge;
Wine plays the deuce with many a house.

LXXXIX.

Item to *Guillaume Charruan*,
My advocate, be handed down,
However now his fortunes go,
My sheathless blade of rusty brown.
Thereto small change for half-a-crown
To swell whatever purse he bear,
All gathered up from streets in town
And from the cloistered *Temple square*.

XC.

Item, in wish to reimburse
My *Fournier*, his legal paws
Five times may plunge inside my purse
(Nor spare to clutch with all their claws !)
Because he won me many a cause,
By *Jesus Christ*, all just and right,
So found when tested by the laws :
But right needs skill to make it might.

XCI.

Item, I unto *Master Jacques*
Raguyer, the *Grève's* great cup devise :
Provided he will pay four placks,
Though forced to sell to gain the prize
What covers up his legs and thighs
And hurry bare-breeched in his shoes
Each morning early, as he hies
Unto the *Fir-cone* Inn for booze.

XCII.

Item, but as to *Merebeuf* now
And *Nicolas de Louviers* too,
I leave them neither bull nor cow,
As neatherds they would never do.
Indeed I make no jest of you,
They are as mighty falcon lovers
As ever from *Dame Masbecroue*
Took packs of partridges and plovers.

XCIII.

Item, let *Robert Turgis* come
To me at once, I'll pay my bill
For liquor, but to find my home
He'll need much more than wizard's skill.
I'll leave to him my right to fill,
As *Paris* bred, a civic chair . . .
The idiom's provincial, still
'Twas taught me by two ladies fair.

XCIV.

Two ladies very fair and dear !
 By *Saint Genou* their dwellings be,
St. Julien des Voventes is near,
 Where *Poitou* joins with *Brittany* ;
 No further hint shall come from me,
 So guess all day and night as well ;
 I am not such a fool you see . . .
 But mean to kiss and never tell.

XCV.

Item, to *Sergeant Jehan Raguyet*,
 One of the Twelve, as donative
 A cheesecake crisp his chops to cheer
 Each day that he remains alive,
 And *Bailly's* table shall contrive
 To grant this cake ; in *Maubue Street*
 From pump his throttle will derive
 Cool liquor to wash down his meat.

XCVI.

Item, the *Prince of Fools* shall take
Michault de Four as pantaloon,
 Well practised many jests to make
 And sentimental songs to croon :
 With that I'll bid good-afternoon.
 In short, in all, save girth, he's pleasant,
 A very natural buffoon
 Who pleases best where he's not present.

XCVII.

Item, of the Eleven Score
Two worthy sergeants, *Jehan Vallette*
And *Denis Richier*, to the core
Both good and honest men, shall get,
Yes each, a mighty aiguilet
To hang down from the felten cap :
Foot-sloggers' fees, *videlicet* ;
The horse-guards shall not have a rap.

XCVIII.

I leave to *Pernet*, in addition,
Three loaded dice that cannot err,
Or pack of cards to take position
Now filled by baton sinister,
And free his scutcheon from the slur . . .
Yet stay ; he must be mute behind,
Or may a quartan ague stir
Him up and shake with every wind.

XCIX.

Item, of *Chollet* here I beg
To choose a trade that's more genteel,
And cease repairing stoup and keg
With staves and bits of board piecemeal,
But buy a sword of *Lyons* steel
To carve up brawlers unaware :
Though noise and riot don't appeal
To him, yet he can do his share.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

C.

Item, to wolfish *John*, a man
Of merchandise and in good case,
Because he's thin and spare of span
And *Chollet's* rotten at the chase,
I leave a dog of setter race
Who'll pass no poultry on the way,
Thereto a mantle to embrace
Them all and hide the feathered prey.

CI.

Du Boys, the goldsmith, just five score
Of nail-shaped cloves, with point and head,
Of ginger from the Turkish shore;
That couples cunningly, instead
Of boxes, lovers in a bed,
And ham to sausages conjoins,
And makes the bosom swell and spread,
And vigour flow into the loins.

CII.

To *Captain Jehan Riou*, in wish
His archers and himself may dine,
Six heads of wolves to fill their dish,
No food for folk that herd the swine,
All choicely cooked in household wine
When caught by butcher's mastiff-dog.
To gain such cheer one would decline
No sin in all the decalogue.

CIII.

As meat its weight is something more
Than feathers, cork, or thistledown.
'Tis fitted for a soldier's store,
Or use in a beleaguered town.
If traps ensnare the vermin brown,
The mastiffs should be flayed for curs,
I swear it, by my doctor's gown,
To make the soldiers winter furs.

CIV.

Item, to *Robin Trousecaille*,
Grown fat by services discreet,
To run afoot he is no quail,
A thick-set cob's his favourite seat ;
I give him from my dresser neat
A bowl he dared not take on loan ;
His household ware will be complete
With it, and everything his own.

CV.

Item, to *Perrot Girard* sworn
As barber unto *Bourg-la-Reine*,
Two basins and a lance be borne
Since he is sharp to gather gain.
Six years ago or so the swain
On porkers of a fatted growth
Did me a sennight entertain ;
As *Pourras'* abbess can take oath.

CVI.

Item, the many begging friars
And nuns with all their retinue
'Neath *Orleans* or *Paris* spires,
A farcical and scurvy crew,
With custards now I do bedew
And *Jacobins'* own greasy broth :
Then contemplation may ensue
Behind four-poster curtain cloth.

CVII.

They surely mother every child,
Although this boon my gift is not.
Because for *God's* sake oft reviled
From Him this rich reward they got.
These handsome priests must pay their shot
In *Paris* even, as we know.
They please our women quite a lot,
And prove their love to husbands so.

CVIII.

Jehan de Pontlieu had much to say
Against the friars, but all he spoke
Was forced in public one fine day
In shame and sorrow to revoke.
Their ways to *Mathew* seemed a joke,
And *Jehan de Mehun* to mirth enticed,
But one must honour all the folk
That honoured have the *Church of Christ*.

CIX.

So I will play a humble part
And never offer contradiction,
Their words and deeds with all my heart
Approve with uttermost conviction.
Their slanderers deserve affliction,
For whether in church or place apart
Or somewhere else there may be friction
With those inclined to take their part.

CX.

Item, to *Baulde*, monk resident
Within the cloister *Carmelite*,
Whose ways be tough and bold, be sent
A casque and halberts apposite.
De Tusca's ruffian soldiers might
Snap up his playmate any minute.
He's old : but if he will not fight,
The fiend of *Vauvert* must be in it.

CXI.

Item, because the chancellor's clerk
Has licked fly-droppings not a little,
I give, since he's a man of mark,
His seal annointment with my spittle,
And may his thumb be sealed with brittle
Official wax, to cut it short ;
The rest concern me not a tittle,
I mean him of the Bishop's court.

CXII.

With wainscoating I will enrich
 The room wherein the Council meets,
 And all whose hinder portions itch
 Shall sit on chairs with privy seats,
 Provided heavy fining greets
Macée of Orleans who wore
 My girdle in the public streets
 Against the law, the little whore.

CXIII.

Item, to *Francis Vacquerie*,
 Promoter of the cowshed hight,
 A high Scots gorget I decree,
 But with no goldsmith's art bedight;
 Because when he was made a knight
Saint George and *God* were roundly cursed.
 Who hears of it in mad delight
 Must laugh till he is fit to burst.

CXIV.

Item, to *Master Jehan Laurens*
 Whose eyes are ever red and sore
 Because his parents gave offence
 By swilling casks and flasks galore,
 I hand my pocket-linings o'er
 To wipe them with at break of day . . .
 If made a prelate, he'd have store
 Of silk for which there's more to pay.

CXV.

Item, to *Jehan Cotard* I owe,
My proctor of the church court kind,
The matter of a coin or so
That's due, as I recall to mind,
Since knavery *Denise* designed
And said I'd given her abuse :
His soul (be it with *God* enshrined)
Shall have this prayer writ in excuse.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Ballade

&

Prayer.

OLD *Noah*, you who first did plant the vine,
You also, *Lot*, who drank so heartily
Within the cave till Cupid did incline
Your daughters both to come too close, perdie ;
(Fear no reproaches on that score from me ;)
Architriclin, renowned for drinking far ;
I pray you harbour kindly, all you three,
The soul of worthy *Master Jehan Cotard*.

For he a scion was of your own line,
With best and dearest wine did well agree ;
Without a sixpence wherewithal to dine
Would drink what came, no epicure was he :
Nor from his pots would separated be,
No laggard he to empty jug or jar.
Oh sirs, do not condemn by your decree
The soul of worthy *Master Jehan Cotard*.

With *dotard*'s feet, that slip and intertwine,
When bound for bed full oft we might him see ;
And once his pate acquired a scar as sign
That with a butcher's stall it made too free.
No better drinker could be found than he,
Search all the earth wherever toppers are !
So, when it calls, admit without a fee
The soul of worthy *Master Jehan Cotard*.

Prince, though he oft was drunk as drunk could be,
He'd shout : " My throat's afire ! " across the bar ;
For thirst could never find the knack to flee
The soul of worthy *Master Jehan Cotard*.

CXVI.

Item, I wish that *Merle* the youth
Shall at my money-changing ply ;
I want to try exchange, in truth,
To gain some profit on the sly
At home, abroad, or where care I !
Six targets held to match three crowns ;
Two angelets an angel buy ;
For friends should not be stingy clowns.

CXVII.

Item, I heard while travelling here
My three poor orphan boys have grown,
Becoming riper every year,
No sheepshead on their shoulders shown.
From here to *Sallins* none is known
As better taught in all the schools.
Now, by all friars that wisdom own,
Such boys as these cannot be fools.

CXVIII.

My will is they should study thus :
Where? *Pierre Richier's* the very spot.
Donatus is too arduous :
Such tether shall not be their lot.
They'll know, and quite enough I wot,
Ave, Salus, tibi decus,
All other learning be forgot :
Great clerks are seldom prosperous.

CXIX.

These be their toils, then off they hie !
 All surplus lore they must eschew.
 The lengthy *Credo* be passed by,
 For such young things 'tis much ado.
 My tabard big I've cut in two,
 And wish one half of it to sell
 To purchase custard for the crew,
 For youth likes dainty morsels well.

CXX.

That they be drilled in manners good,
 Whate'er the cost be, is my plan :
 To go about with close-drawn hood
 And thumbs stuck in the girdle's span ;
 With humble mien to every man ;
 Replying : " Eh ? What ? No indeed ! "
 Folk's thoughts will be none other than :
 " These boys be of the proper breed ! "

CXXI.

Item, those clerks so full of want
 Fine fellows straight as any reed,
 Myself disseising with this grant,
 To them my legal claims I cede,
 (So be assigned each title-deed,
 Sans charge, all safe as hand can get
 With signature and date at need),
 Against *Guillaume Gueuldry* his debt.

CXXII.

Although they're full of impudence
And youth, my anger does not rise.
Years twenty, thirty, forty hence,
Please *God*, they'll be quite otherwise.
Men are wrong-headed to despise
The charm and beauty of such youth,
And mad to buffet or chastise ;
For boys like these turn men forsooth.

CXXIII.

A College bursary shall reap
Each one : its grant I undertake.
No dormice they to lie asleep
Three months on end and never wake.
At best but wretched sleepers make
Young hearts in youth, and later those
Perforce must age, for slumber's sake,
When old in years they need repose.

CXXIV.

My letters to the bursars read
Exact in every turn and phrase :
Their prayers must for their patron plead
Or ears well pulled requite delays.
Some folk, indeed, are in amaze
My heart should love these two young men :
But, faith, church-wakes or holidays
Ne'er brought their mothers in my ken.

CXXV.

Item, *Charlot Taranne* shall share
Michault Culdou's bequest alone,
 One hundred halfpence : gathered where ?
 No odds : like manna they'll be strown ;
 And cowhide boots they both shall own
 With soles and uppers strongly girt,
 Provided they will kiss my *Joan*
 And such another piece of skirt.

CXXVI.

I leave my *Lord of Grigny* now,
 To whom I left *Bicêtre* before,
 The *Billy* tower, but he must vow
 Each broken pane and fallen door
 At his own charges to restore
 And every part to overhaul :
 On every side let money pour :
 I need it, and have none at all.

CXXVII.

Item, to *Thibault de la Garde* . . .
Thibault ? I lie, his name is *John* . . .
 What can I give he won't discard ?
 I've lost enough the year that's gone.
God will provide, so carry on !
 The *Keg* ? But stay and let me think !
 To *Genevois* it must be drawn
 Who has a better head for drink.

CXXVIII.

Item, *Basanyer*, notary,
The Criminal Court Clerk as well,
A creel of cloves shall have from me
Supplied by Master *Jehan Ruel*.
The same to *Mautainct* and *Rosnel*;
To serve like gift of cloves is due
That lord, whose graces all excel,
Saint Christopher's own servant true,

CXXIX.

To whom I give this ballade now
To praise his dame, none better be.
If all alike Love can't endow
There's nothing strange in that; for he,
When *René* king of *Sicily*
Dressed lists, did win his lady there
With deeds and silent modesty
No Trojan's ever could compare.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

*Ballade
that Villon gave
to a Gentleman Newly Married
that He might send it to His Wife
won by His Sword.*

A t that same point of dawn, when falcons bate,
Made merry, as is then their noble ure
B espeaking joy, and on the wing elate
R eceive their food down-stooping to the lure,
Of all desires inflamed that fill a wooer
I offer what suits mates of every feather,
S ince Love prescribes it in no terms obscure
E'en for this end we are alone together.

Dear, you shall rule my heart without debate,
E nthroned till death be my discomfiture,
L ike laurel crowning my victorious state,
O r olive of all bitterness the cure.
R est certain, faith I never will abjure,
E namoured wholly of this pleasing tether,
(So she and I the bondage sweet endure)
E'en for this end we are alone together.

And what is more, when met by grievous fate
Through Fortune that against me doth conjure,
Your gentle eye will banish all her hate
As wind doth chase away the smoky stour.
From such a field the harvest is secure,
God bids me plough and plant in every weather,
The fruit resembles me, no copy truer ;
E'en for this end we are alone together.

My princess, these resolves of mine ensure
My heart will never part from your heart, whether
Come weal or woe : grant me a love as pure,
E'en for this end we are alone together.

CXXX.

Item : to *Jehan Perdryer* be paid
And to his brother *François* . . . nought !
For unto me just that much aid
And share of all their goods they brought ;
Besides my comrade *François* thought
At *Bourges* with sharp and searing tongue,
Which half commanded half besought,
To gain me fame with old and young.

CXXXI.

'Twere vain in *Taillevent* to look ;
The hashes chapter will not show
This dish, nor any other book
Before, behind, above, below.
But *Saint Macaire*, I'd have you know,
Who cooked the devil in his hide
Because the grill smelt better so,
He did this recipe provide.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Ballade.

IN arsenic, the white sort and the red,
I Saltpetre, quicklime, causing countless aches,
To clean them better adding boiling lead ;
In sulphur, pitch, and in those stinking lakes
You may discover in a ghetto jakes ;
In lotions that have cooled a leper's heat ;
In stuff scraped off from shabby shoes and feet :
In blood of asp and drugs with death allied ;
In spleen of wolf and fox and pole-cat sweet
May all such envious tongues as these be fried !

In brain of coal-black cat, whose aged head
Has toothless gums, and fishing quite forsakes ;
In foam and spittle, just as precious, shed
By an old mastiff that with madness quakes ;
In phlegm a mule both worn and jaded makes
With a sharp pair of scissors chopped up neat ;
In water where to dip the rats retreat,
With vermin, toads and all that harm betide,
With serpents, lizards and such noble meat
May all such envious tongues as these be fried.

In sublimate that all to handle dread ;
With navels added cut from living snakes ;
In blood at full-moon by the barbers shed
That on a little furnace dries and bakes,
Whereof some black some green as garlic cakes ;
In cancers, sores and dirty tubs you meet
Where nurses wash their clouts in every street ;
In basins such as harlots can provide,
(Who knows the stews will follow my conceit ;)
May all such envious tongues as these be fried !

Prince, sift these morsels that entice to eat,
(If lacking sacking, gauze or bolting-sheet)
Through an old pair of breeches' foul backside ;
But, first of all, in pig manure complete
May all such envious tongues as these be fried !

CXXXII.

Item, *Franc-Gontier Refuted*
To master *Jehan Courault* I send :
But on a Tyrant, so reputed,
I have no arguments to spend ;
No poor, weak fellow should contend
Against the great, the wise declare,
Lest nets be spread, and in the end
His feet should stumble in a snare.

CXXXIII.

I don't fear *Gontier* ; neither men
Nor money has he more than I ;
There's this dispute between us then :
He values poverty so high,
That to be poor neath any sky
As great good fortune he has rated ;
Which claim of his I must deny.
Who's wrong ? Here be the point debated.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

*Ballade Entitled :
Franc-Gontier Refuted.*

A JOLLY canon on down cushions laid
Beside a stove in room both neat and gay,
Dame Lovesome lying at his side displayed,
Fair, tender, smooth and tricked in rare array :
A-drinking wine from dawn to eve were they,
Rejoicing, kissing, toying, full of glee,
And both all bared the easier to be,
I saw them through the keyhole on my knees :
Then knew, that if from care we would be free
No treasure is like living at our ease.

If *Franc-Gontier* and *Helen* his sweet maid
Had ever made of such delight assay,
Their hunger ne'er with brittle crusts were stayed,
Or onions that foul breath bestow alway.
Their buttermilk and other drinks, *perfoy*,
Are in less worth than garlic held by me.
They boast of sleeping neath the woodland tree,
Doth not a chair-flanked bedstead better please ?
What say you ? Does it need a longer plea ?
No treasure is like living at our ease.

They feed on coarse brown bread and grain decayed,
And all the year drink water, yea or nay.
From here to *Babylon* no serenade
Of birds would hold me for a single day,
No not one morn, for fare like this to stay !
Franc-Gontier with *Helen* may agree
For joys beneath the eglantine to flee ;
I need not frown, if such their hearts appease ;
Whatever bliss in country life they see,
No treasure is like living at our ease.

Prince, judge between us all of each degree.
For me, let none be wrath at what he sees,
Still young in years I learnt to touch this key,
No treasure is like living at our ease.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

CXXXIV.

Item, because her *Bible* knowledge
Gives *Dame Bruyeres* the right of speech,
I grant her and her female college
On all, save Gospel texts, to preach,
Those gossips better ways to teach
Whose tongues are sharp as anything,
But far outside the graveyard screech
Where people yarns to market bring.

*Ballade
of the
Women of Paris.*

THOUGH women skill in speech unfold
Neath *Tuscan* or *Venetian* sky,
Yea, even when they're waxen old
On confidential errands fly ;
Let *Roman* dames or *Lombards* try,
Or *Genoese*, support to draw,
Bring *Piedmontese*, *Savoyards* nigh,
There's none to match a *Paris* jaw !

The *Naples* dames like doctors hold,
Discourses, and are never shy ;
The *Germans* cackle, we are told,
The *Prussian* women shrilly cry ;
But search all *Greece* or *Hungary*,
Or *Gypsies* of no land or law,
Castile, or *Spain*, and squeeze them dry,
There's none to match a *Paris* jaw !

All tongues of *Swiss* or *Breton* mould
Or from *Thoulouse* or *Gascony*,
Two wives of *Petit-Pont* would scold
Them dumb, and all *Lorraine* defy
With *England*, *Calais* hold thereby,
(Behold this list of names with awe !)
Valenciennes too and *Picardy*,
There's none to match a *Paris* jaw !

Prince, *Paris* ladies claim the high
Reward of speech without a flaw ;
Italian lips in vain may vie,
There's none to match a *Paris* jaw !

CXXXV.

Just look at two or three at ease
Plumped down on kirtle's lowest pleat
In churches or in monasteries ;
Draw near with cat-like silent feet ;
You'll find *Macrobius* could compete
With none of these in powers of thought ;
Mark, learn and bear off something meet ;
For proper lessons there are taught.

CXXXVI.

Item, to *Montmartre* cloister-crowned
Which is a very ancient hill
I do convey and join the mound
That's known as *Mont Valerien* still ;
A quarter-year too from the Bill
Of Pardon that I brought from *Rome* ;
So, many Christians enter will
The walls where no man feels at home.

CXXXVII.

Item, to serving maids and men
In households rich, who make their diet
Of tarts and flawns and pastries when
At midnight lord and dame lie quiet,
And empty (wronging no one by it)
Much sooner eight than seven glasses,
My counsel is to make no riot
And not forget the sport of asses.

CXXXVIII.

Item, those heiresses with dozens
Of maids and men who crook the knee
And fathers, mothers, aunts and cousins,
Shall, by my soul, have nought from me :
’Tis suited well to their degree.
For scraps no *Jacobin* would measure
As worth the picking up may be
Great wealth to some poor girls of pleasure.

CXXXIX.

Monks *Benedictine* and *Chartreuse*,
Though strict their life in cloister cell,
At times a broader highway choose,
As these poor lasses know too well :
Perette and *Jacqueline* could tell,
Or *Isabeau* who swears : “ I’facks ! ”
A man will scarcely merit hell
For wanting to supply their lacks.

CXL.

Item, *Margot* so fat and bloated,
In face and figure sweetly odd,
To all good works she’s most devoted,
Faith, by our *Lady*, and by *God* !
She loves me well, the gentle bawd,
And I her every phase and feature.
Who meets her on his walks abroad
May read this ballade to the creature.

Ballade
Of Villon & Fat Margot.

IF I do serve my love, nor ask for hire,
Must that be termed a vile or foolish trade?
For she possesses all that men desire.
I don for her the buckler and the blade.
When folks come in, with pot in hand displayed
I fetch the wine as silent as the dead,
Fruit, water, cheese, loaf, on the table spread,
And, if they pay well, show politeness great:
"Revisit us, when looking for a bed,
Within this brothel where we keep our state!"

But other times the fat is in the fire,
Margot comes home without a penny made;
I hate her sight; my heart is filled with ire;
And swear her finery shall be conveyed
To pawn, since giving credit I forbade.
At that in scorn she tosses high her head
And, arms akimbo, swears in language dread,
By *Christ*, I shan't! To finish the debate
A sudden slap upon her visage red
Within this brothel where we keep our state.

Then fully charged my rearguard gun I fire
Of dunghill stench; when peace at last is made.
She pats my head all smiles, and coming nigher
We bill and coo like turtles in the shade.
As drunk as owls in bed together laid;
When we awake by longing she is led
To save love's fruit and cover me instead.
I groan below no burden light of weight;
Caressing her my strength and health are shed
Within this brothel where we keep our state.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Come wind, come hail, come frost, I've baked my bread!
A brawling bully to a baggage wed.
Each worthy of the other be it said.
Like follows like ; the beast must find its mate.
We sought the mire, and mire befouls our tread.
We fled from honour, honour now is fled,
Within this brothel where we keep our state.

CXLI.

Item, big *Joan* the *Breton* maid
Has leave to hold a public school
With *Marion* the *Idol's* aid
Where pupils over teachers rule.
Since, save in *Mebun's* prison cool,
Such markets are held everywhere,
No need for trade-signs fanciful,
I say, the work is no ways rare !

CXLII.

Item, to *Noë*, called *The Beauty*,
No better gift in no event
Than willow rods prepared for duty,
And freshly cut, could I present.
Sweet are the alms of chastisement ;
Nor should his soul dread my command,
Eleven score of stripes be spent
On him by hangman *Henry's* hand.

CXLIII.

I know not what I can devise
For hospital's or hostel's care ;
This is no time for sending lies ;
The poor have ills enough to bear.
Each one may send his garlic there.
The begging friars have had my goose ;
At best, the bones be paupers' share :
Small money for small people's use.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

CXLIV.

Item, to pay my barber's labour,
(*Colin Galerne* who doth abide
The herbist *Angelot's* near neighbour)
A lump of ice . . . Whence? *Marne* supplied.
This clapped close to his belly's side
The winter he may spend at ease.
If wintry cures like this be tried
Next year no summer heats will tease.

CXLV.

Item, the *Foundlings* shall have nought:
But troops forlorn some comfort need;
At *Marion* the *Idol's* brought
Together nightly be the breed,
A lesson of my school I'll read
To all of them, both brief and fast.
Heads hard and foolish, pay good heed
Thereunto; for it is my last.

*Villon's
Good Counsel to the
Forlorn Hope.*

DEAR lads, beware of letting fall
The fairest rose you own to-day ;
My clerks, like bird-lime gripping all,
When out upon the prigging lay
Or robbing, watch your skins I pray :
For following these pastimes twain
Colin de Cayeux had to pay,
Relying on appeals in vain.

Where lives and even souls are played
It truly is no paltry game :
If lost, repentance will not aid,
But one must die in evil fame ;
If won, no *Dido*, royal dame
Of *Carthage*, comes within your clutch.
That man's a fool and lost to shame
Who for so little stakes so much.

Give ear and learn my lesson right :
They truly say, as years expire
A lake of wine is drunk up quite
By summer glade or winter fire.
No coin that's fruitful you acquire ;
But all you get is spent with speed.
Who profits by the devil's hire ?
No man e'er throve by wicked deed.

Ballade
of Good Doctrine to Those of a
Naughty Life.

FOR if forged bulls about ye bear,
Or let cogged dice your luck amend,
Or make false coins, of burns beware,
For traitors vile that so offend
In boiling water meet their end ;
To theft or highway robbery fall :
Where, think ye, will the profits wend ?
To taverns and to harlots all !

Make rhymes, brawls, music everywhere,
To wit of fools or clowns descend ;
In farces, plays and concerts share ;
In masques or shows of moral trend
The ears of town and city rend ;
Or win at cards and games of ball :
Where goes the coin ye gain ? Perpend :
To taverns and to harlots all !

If for such filth ye do not care,
Dig, mow and o'er the sickle bend ;
Or if ye be of learning bare,
Take service, mules and horses tend ;
Be pleased if you have aught to spend ;
Beat hemp or linen with a maul ;
Where do your wages go, my friend ?
To taverns and to harlots all !

Coat, jerkin, cloak belaced, you send
Each clout and garment great or small
Before they're worn or know a mend,
To taverns and to harlots all !

CXLVI.

My boon companions, this to you
Who make so free in every place ;
Shun, shun the horrid sunburnt hue
That darkens the dead felon's face ;
Avoid it, as a bad disgrace
As well as may be from it fly ;
Fore *God*, to heart this truth embrace,
An hour will come when you must die.

CXLVII.

Item, I give the Fifteen-Score,
Three-hundred were a name as good,
The *Paris*, not *Provincial*, Corps,
Because I owe them gratitude,
My spectacles ; (but don't include
The case), because they lack the art
To set the decent and the lewd
At *Innocents'* in graves apart.

CXLVIII.

For here there are no smiles or play.
In vain they gained inheritances,
In richly valanced bedsteads lay,
Swilled wine, increased their girth-expanses,
Had revels, festivals and dances,
While death drew nearer every day.
Soon fade such pleasures and romances,
But all the sin of them will stay.

CXLIX.

These skulls whereon my vision rests
Heaped up in charnel-houses dank
Perchance were Masters of Requests,
Or once of Privy Council rank,
Or under market-baskets stank ;
Since each and all speak just as little,
Of bishop or of mountebank,
I truly cannot tell a tittle.

CL.

And those who very lowly bowed
To one another in their day,
Whereof a few were rulers proud
While more did tremble and obey,
They've had their fill and now decay
Together in a heap pell-mell.
Their lordships all have flown away ;
The clerk from master who can tell ?

CLI.

They all are dead ; their souls *God* cheer.
As for their flesh, 'tis rotted quite.
Those who were lords and ladies here
Whose nice and tender appetite
Rice, cream and pastry nourished right,
Their bones have mouldered into dust,
Unthrilled by laughter or delight . . .
Christ's pardon will be theirs I trust !

CLII.

This song for those who vanished are
I've made, and do communicate
To regents, courts, both bench and bar,
The crime of avarice who hate,
And in their service to the state
Both bones and bodies wither quick :
To them, when dead, commiserate
Be *God* and be *Saint Dominic*.

Lay.

IN turn from that vile cell to go
Where life was almost left by me,
Judge what an error there would be
If Fortune still remains my foe !
I should, by rights, it seemeth so,
Some of her smiles of favour see
In turn.

That I should reap death's fullest woe
No man of reason will agree ;
Please *God*, my spirit if set free
His mansion's joys above may know
In turn.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

CLIII.

Item, since I am fairy-bred
I give to *Lomer* love's best hap,
The art to turn each female head
Neath girlish snood or matron's cap,
And 'twill not cost a single rap
To him, nor warm his head at night
One hundred times to fill the gap
In *Danish Holgar's* great despite.

CLIV.

Item, *Jacques Cardon* not a mite,
(I've nought to suit him, more's the pity,
Nor mean to offer any slight)
Except this shepherd's song so pretty :
If it were *Marionette*, the ditty
Composed for *Marion Tawny-bide*,
Or that one, *Ope thy portal, Kitty*,
It would go well with mustard tried.

CLV.

Item, I leave Love's pining guild
Besides the lay of *Chartier* dead
A stoup for holy water filled
With tears and sobs above their bed,
With sprig of eglantine o'erspread,
Still evergreen, the drops to dole,
Provided fitting prayers be said
Or chanted for poor *Villon's* soul.

CLVI.

I grant this licence to *Jacques James*,
Who kills himself in gathering so,
To be betrothed to all the dames
He covets, but to marry, no !
Why hoards he ? For his own I trow.
He'd grasp at scraps unfit for hogs ;
What's gained by bitchery should go
By rights, I fancy, to the dogs.

CLVII.

Item, the *Seneschal Camus*
Who once from debt did me release
In recompense the blacksmith's dues
For shoeing little ducks and geese . . .
These silly tales all of a piece
I send to pass his time ; at need
They may his stock of spills increase.
Good singing wearies one indeed.

CLVIII.

I leave the *Captain of the Guard*
Two little pages fair of face,
Philippe and *Marquet* fat as lard,
Who served, and thus grew wise apace,
The best part of their lives his Grace
The *Provost-Marshal Tristan* grim.
Alas, if they should lose this place
They must go bare both foot and limb.

CLIX.

Friend *Chappelain* shall have indeed
 My chapel tonsured like his pate ;
 'Twill be no heavy task to read
 A mass with nought to consecrate.
 My cure, too, I would delegate,
 But at no cure of souls he aims
 And all confessions holds in hate
 Save those of dainty maids or dames.

CLX.

Because he knows my meaning clear
Jehan de Calays of honest fame,
 (We have not met this thirty year,
 He even does not know my name),
 As arbiter I do proclaim ;
 If any puzzles people find
 In this my will to make the same
 As smooth as any apple-rind.

CLXI.

With glosses, comments, definitions,
 Prescriptions also at command,
 With diminutions or additions ;
 To cancel with his own right hand,
 Transcribe what's hard to understand,
 Or well or ill, pursue his bent,
 Interpret and the sense expand ;
 To all these powers I give consent.

CLXII.

If anyone has passed away
To life through death unknown to me,
I do empower the said *Calays*,
So that my orders followed be
And my behests fulfilled, that he
Those legacies elsewhere apply
In modes from all self-seeking free ;
For on his soul I do rely.

CLXIII.

In *Saint Avoys's* and not elsewhere
My sepulchre shall then be made ;
And so that all may view me there,
If not in flesh by picture's aid,
My form and stature be portrayed
In ink, if cheap enough, no more.
A tomb? No ; no such vain parade ;
'Twould be too weighty for the floor.

CLXIV.

Item, I wish around my crypt
What follows, and no further tale,
Be written in no puny script ;
And if supplies of ink should fail,
Let coal or charcoal draw the trail,
But so as not to hurt the plaster :
So shall my memory prevail
As one in wit and folly Master.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

CLXV.

*Here lies & sleeps within this tomb
A scholar poor & never tall,
Slain by Love's fatal arrow, whom
Men's tongues did Francis Villon call.
No lands he owned however small.
He gave his all, the fact is plain :
Board, trestles, basket, bread & all.
For God's sake, sing him this refrain.*

Rondeau.

ETERNAL rest be his for aye
In clear and everlasting light ;
No dish or platter worth a mite
He ever had, or sprig of bay.
His hair, beard, brows were shaved away,
Like turnip scraped and peeled aright.
Eternal rest be his for aye.

Harsh justice his behind did flay
And make him seek in exile flight ;
In vain 'twas : " I appeal " to say,
A law term not too recondite.
Eternal rest be his for aye.

CLXVI.

The belfry great, of glass not fashioned,
Shall let a jangling peal be tolled ;
All hearts will thrill at those impassioned,
Sweet songs from chimes full swing outrolled.
As stories tell, in days of old
They saved the homeland many times :
Nor thunder dire nor foemen bold
But fled the clangour of those chimes.

CLXVII.

The ringers shall receive four loaves ;
If this seem mean, then double three,
As much as a rich man behoves ;
But of *Saint Stephen* shall they be.
For *Vollant* as his trouble's fee
One loaf. Beholding him I claim
A week 'twill last him easily.
Who else ? *Jehan de la Garde* the same.

CLXVIII.

All to perfect and to complete
Executors whose names ensue
I make ; such tasks to them be sweet
And much content their debtors too.
Though boasting never was their cue,
Yet each, thank *God*, has means to spend !
So they shall see this business through . . .
Six names I'll write : and then an end.

CLXIX.

Lieutenant *Martin Bellefaye*
 Who in Crown cases doth excel.
 And who as second? I should say
 That 'tis a job for *Colombel*.
 If he accepts and likes it well,
 He'll all discharge in manner just.
 Another? *Michel Jouvenel*.
 These three alone shall take the trust.

CLXX.

But if they seek to be excused
 As dreading the first costs to pay,
 Or if the office be refused,
 I do appoint this next relay,
 All right good men in every way :
Philippe Bruneau, shall have the labour,
 Brave knight, with him bear equal sway
 Good Master *Jacques Raguyer*, his neighbour.

CLXXI.

As third, *Jacques James* with these have station,
 Three men of means and honour known,
 Desirous of their souls' salvation
 And fearing *God* upon his throne.
 They rather would expend their own
 Than leave the trusts unsatisfied.
 The whole they shall control alone
 And, as seems best to them, divide.

CLXXII.

The *Master of the Wills*, so called,
Shall meddle not with *quid* or *quo* ;
For in that office be installed
A youthful priest *Colas Tacot*.
To drink with him I fain would go,
Although my hat be sold to pay.
If he were able balls to throw,
I'd give him best at every play.

CLXXIV.

Guillaume du Ru shall manage all
The lights displayed around the bier.
To bear the corners of the pall
Let my executors appear.
Down, hair, beard, eyebrows more severe
Distresses feel and torture me.
My sickness grows ; the time is here
To cry you mercy, all of ye.

THE GREAT TESTAMENT

Ballade

Wherein Villon Cries all Folk Mercy.

TO *Benedictine* and *Chartreuse* ;
To begging friars and devotees ;
To maids and wives and all who use
To wear the corset and chemise ;
To lazy drones and worker bees ;
To love-sick dandiprats who run
All buckskin-booted to the knees ;
I cry you mercy, every one !

To little flirts who offer views
Of bosoms, in desire to tease ;
To rioters and rowdy crews
And men with monkeys full of fleas ;
To idiots, grouped in twos and threes,
Who keep on whistling for fun ;
To widows, flappers ripe for hes ;
I cry you mercy, every one !

Who all but crusts did me refuse
With water cold enough to freeze,
No, those vile dogs I'll not excuse
Who robbed my belly of its ease !
I'd shame them with a downward sneeze,
But, sitting, I can summon none :
Well, well, then, to avoid a breeze,
I cry you mercy, every one !

Their fifteen ribs I fain would grease
With cudgel-oil, and senses stun
With bullets or such balls as these :
I cry you mercy, every one !

Ballade
To serve as Conclusion.

SO here the testament doth end ;
SPoor *Villon* his last word hath said.
Come to his burial, each friend,
By sound of belfry clamour led,
In clothes the hue of blood new shed,
Because he died Love's martyr dear :
He swore, by cock, Love struck him dead
Preparing to depart from here.

On this as truth we may depend,
For he, perforce, in tatters fled
From her would not his plight amend.
No thorn or bramble lifts its head
From here to *Roussillon* outspread
That had not, let the truth appear,
Snatched from his clothes a scrap or thread,
Preparing to depart from here.

So when he died, we comprehend,
He scarce was worth a single shred.
What's more : Love keenest shafts did send
Against him on his dying bed ;
To strike their mark the arrows sped
More sharp than point of buckle's gear,
(Which truly is a marvel dread)
Preparing to depart from here.

Prince, as a falcon gently bred,
Know what he did when death was near :
He drank a draught of vintage red
Preparing to depart from here.

HERE ENDETH
THE GREAT TESTAMENT.

NOTES TO
THE TESTAMENTS.

THE LITTLE TESTAMENT.

M. Louis Thouasne, the latest & not the least erudite editor of Villon, is very insistent that this poem should be known as "The Lay of Master Francis Villon," pointing out that the more usual title was given contrary to the poet's wishes. I have given the alternative titles, & the reader can choose which he prefers.

IV. a horse with four white feet. *Proverbially untrustworthy.*

XI. my trenchant sword. *Evidently pawned at a tavern.*

XII. White Horse tavern sign. *In this verse & many others Villon drags in allusions to the tavern signs of old Paris, not forgetting the most notable of all, the Pomme de Pin, or Fir-Cone.*

the bull etc. This was a bull of Pope Calixtus III, ordering Christians to confess to their parish priests, & revoking a former bull of Pope Nicholas V. which had given the mendicant friars as wide powers of hearing confessions.

XIV. *The verse is satirical. Vallée, in reality, was a rich Clerk of the Parliament.*

XV. "The Art of Memory." *A mediæval book, of a purport explained by the title. Villon's opinion of it may be gauged by the remark that it will be found in the hands of Tom Fool.*

XVIII. three hounds. *Nobles were the sole class privileged to keep hounds for the chase.*

XXI. The Provost. *Robert d'Estouteville, Provost of Paris, whose wife, Ambroise de Loré, was a patroness of the poet.*

XXV. *This & the following verse are satiric. The three orphan boys in reality were very rich men, the first-named a captain of finance, the second a money-lender, the third a profiteer.*

Every epoch has produced such hungry souls, whose store of worldly possessions is ever in need of being increased.

FRANÇOIS VILLON

- XXVIII. *Similarly, the two poor clerks mentioned in this verse were in reality two wealthy prelates, lacking all the qualities wherewith the poet mockingly has invested them.*
- XXX. *A fine picture of the fifteenth-century unemployed.*
- XXXVI. *In this & the following verses Villon parodies the terminology of philosophers, whereof every age possesses its own particular jargon.*
- XXXIX. *This gives us a glimpse into the garret of a man of letters in 1456. "Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans !"*

THE GREAT TESTAMENT.

- V. Cotard. *For more information about the peculiar sanctity of this individual see the ballade later in the Great Testament.*
- Picards. *The inhabitants of Picardy were supposed to be tainted with heresy, hence a prayer said in their manner might not be very efficacious.*
- VI. Deus Laudem. *Psalm 108, verse 7.*
- XV. *Villon is alluding to the Roman de la Rose by Jehan de Meung and Guillaume de Loris.*
- XX. *The story is taken from Nonius Marcellus, not from Valerius Maximus.*
- XXVIII. *This stanza paraphrases Job ch. 7, verse 6.*
- XXXVI. Jacques Cœur. *The richest Frenchman of his day. He lent Charles VII money to carry on the wars against the English, was not repaid & died poor. A better patriot than financier.*

BALLADE OF THE LADIES OF BYEGONE TIMES.

- Buridan. *This scholar's adventure with the naughty French queen in the Tour de Nesle was a popular fable of the times.*
- Bertha debonair. *The mother of Charlemagne in the romances, which apply this epithet to her. Also known as Bertha "big-foot," the name used by Villon.*

Joan, the valour of Lorraine. *I take it that the original la bonne Lorraine conveys the idea of bravery still attached to the adjective in the phrase "the good knight."*

BALLADE OF THE LORDS OF BYGONE TIMES.

King of Scots. *James II ob. 1456. His face was disfigured by a birthmark.*

Breton Claquin. *Duguesclin, the patriot leader against the English.*

BALLADE ON THE SAME THEME.

The golden-handed emperors. *The Byzantine emperors were often represented wearing gilded gauntlets.*

The stout, wise Dauphin. *The title of Dauphin was purchased by Philip of Valois who began his reign in 1328. Imbert or Hubert the last Count of Dauphiné and Viennois, who was called the Dauphin of Viennois, sold his title to the French king because he had no heir to succeed him. The first of the royal house to hold the title was Charles V during the lifetime of his father King John, whom he succeeded 1364.*

XLII. At Rennes a needy peddler known. *Mercerot de Rennes in original. See introductory essay for note on the fraternity of peddlars. Rennes may have been Villon's place of initiation into this doubtful society.*

THE REGRETS OF THE FAIR ARMOURESS.

It appears to have been the custom for the "bona robas" of Paris in Villon's day to have been known by the name of some trade, either as having sprung from that particular class, or from some idiosyncrasy in their costumes. C.f. the epithets applied to the damsels in the ensuing ballade.

The beauteous Armouress. *She was a very real personage. Born about 1375 she would have been 86 in 1461 when Villon immortalized her unhappy history. She was the mistress of Nicolas d'Orgemont, Master of the Chamber*

of Accounts & Canon of Notre-Dame, son to a Chancellor & brother of a Bishop of Paris, who actually installed her in a house in the cloister of Notre-Dame, from which however she was expelled by the indignant Chapter in 1394. In 1416 d'Orgemont having become implicated in a plot against the state was thrown into prison, despoiled of all his property, & died in a few months. The Armouress, then a woman of 40, placed herself under the protection of a despicable creature who exploited her till his death in 1426. The remainder of her life was a mere process of sinking from one degradation to the next. It seems certain that Villon must have known & conversed with her; hence this unforgettable poem.

What's come now to the forehead fair, etc. Readers of mediæval French should compare this detailed description of feminine charms with a very similar passage in "*Aucassin & Nicolette*." The armouress in bewailing her vanished charms falls naturally into the language of the romances she had heard sung by minstrels in her youth.

DOUBLE BALLADE.

Sardana. Neither the name of this hero, nor yet any account of a prototype is met with outside of Villon's verse. The poet seems to have had vague recollections of Sardanapalus in describing a mythical squire of dames.

LXIII. the fruits of woe. The choke-pear, a form of gag.

LXVI. Turgis was the proprietor of the famous Pomme-de-pin, the Fir-cone Tavern, situated in the Rue de la Juiverie in the city. Probably Villon's other heirs followed equally cheery trades.

LXVII. In the Petit Testament Villon had left Perrenet Marchant, called the Bastard de la Barre, three trusses of straw for an indescribable purpose. He now supplements that gift. This worthy appears to have been a crony of Villon, as there are several allusions to him in the poem;

he receives two legacies & appears as a man fit to be sent on unpleasant errands.

LXXVII. For Guillaume de Villon see introductory essay.

LXXVIII. that romance etc. "*Le pet au Diable*" was a pillar stone which caused a famous town & gown riot in Paris. Nothing is known of this romance, if indeed it ever was written.

LXXXVI. a lodging low etc. 'Promptsault suggests that Villon's wish is that the thief may be broken on the wheel.

LXXXVIII. Hesselin was a rich Parisian merchant of the day. One can imagine the willingness wherewith mine host Turgis would have supplied wine to anyone on Master Francis's score !

XCI. Jacques Raguyer, an ecclesiastic who became Bishop of Troyes in 1483. Villon insinuates that he drank more than was good for him. The great cup was probably some tavern sign hanging in the Place de Grève. For his brother Jean Raguyer see stanza XCV.

XCV. Jean Raguyer was one of the twelve sergeants attached as guards to the Provost of Paris. Brother to Jacques Raguyer. Bailly was a clerk in the Chancery of the Ecclesiastical Court of Notre Dame de Paris. The insinuation may be that Jean was as great an eater as his brother was a drinker.

XCVI. In 1457 Michault du Four held the office of "*sergent à verge*" in the Châtelet prison. He figures as such in the trial for the robbery in the Collège de Navarre, & probably fell foul of the poet, who now recommends him for employment to any leader of a troop of comedians needing a clown.

XCVII. There were eleven score sergeants attached to the Provost of Paris. Vitu thinks that the gift is chosen because the sergeants were not allowed to wear such ornaments. The eleven score appear to have been mounted police ; perhaps that is the reason why Villon says that the legacy is only intended for those who go afoot.

- XCIX. *There was a Cholet associated with Guy de Tabarie in a brawl in 1456, who later became a "sergent à verge" in the Châtelet & was whipped publicly for riotous behaviour in 1465. The stanza might apply to him. In the Petit Testament Villon left a joint legacy to a Cholet & Jean le Loup, & the mention of Wolfish John in stanza C of the Great Testament seems to indicate that the same pair are still in his mind. The amusement of this pair of friends when the Petit Testament was written seems to have been stealing ducks & poultry outside the walls of Paris & hiding them under their clothes; but in the Grand Testament we seem to see a hint that Cholet has abandoned these courses for more warlike pursuits as the appropriate materials for the chase are left to Jean le Loup alone.*
- CI. *Du Boys was a famous goldsmith in Paris. His guild used to give a dinner to prisoners on Easter Day. Villon may have benefited by this good cheer during one of his incarcerations & for this reason have left a legacy of spices to a man who knew how to use them in preparing savoury food: but this is going deep into the hinterland of conjecture.*
- CV. *Pourras' abbess. The abbess of Port Royal, the former being the popular pronunciation of the name. Villon hints a scandal, there having been some talk about the behaviour of the abbess in 1455.*
- CVIII. *Jean de Pontlieu, Jean de Pouilli ("de Poliacco") adversary of the friars in thirteenth century.*
- Mathew; there are several of this name in the field, Mathew Paris, Mathew of Westminster etc. Que scais-je?*
- Jean de Mehun, the famous author of the "Roman de la Rose."*
- CX. *Baulde, Baude de la Mare, a contemporary poet.*
- the fiend of Vauvert, an apparition of the times as famous as the later Cock-lane ghost.*
- CXII. *the room wherein the council meets, One of the divisions of the Court which sat in the Châtelet was known as the Chambre du Conseil.*

Macée of Orleans etc. *There was a law against silver girdles being worn by filles de joie.*

CXIII. *Francois de la Vacquerie was "promoteur de l'officialité," & later became vicar of Argenteuil. Villon is punning on "Vacquerie, vacherie & vicairie." The scots gorget, according to M. Vitu means a halter. Could the allusion to St. George mean that Vacquerie had had treasonable relations with the English?*

CXIV. *Jean Laurens was one of the ecclesiastical tribunal before whom Guy de Tabarie appeared in 1458. No doubt Villon bore a grudge against all his friend's judges, hence the uncomplimentary allusion to the personal appearance of one of them.*

BALLADE & PRAYER.

Architriclin. *Villon mistook for a proper name the Greek word in the New Testament meaning ruler of the feast, & has enshrined it here as the cognomen of yet another lusty drinker.*

CXXI. *Two young clerks, Guillaume Cotin & Thibault de Vitry had received legacies in the Petit Testament. These are now confirmed. What Villon leaves them is all his legal claims against the house of Guillaume Gueuldry, which the commentators think means the pillory or gallows.*

CXXIII. *The Collège des Dix-huit received students too poor to pay for themselves.*

CXXVI. *In the Petit Testament Villon had left Bicêtre castle to the Sieur de Grigny. He now bestows on him the Tower of Billy which was in a ruinous condition.*

CXXVIII. *Basanyer was notary at the Châtelet in 1458. Mautainct and Rosnel were two of the examining magistrates who investigated the criminal charges against Villon & his companions at the same time.*

that lord whose graces all excel etc. *Robert d'Estouteville, Provost of Paris. He won the hand of his wife Ambroise de*

FRANÇOIS VILLON

Loré at the celebrated tournament held at Saumur by King René in 1446. Clement Marot is responsible for the title of the ensuing ballade which contains a good deal of poetic licence, as the Provost had been married for years when it was written.

CXXX. *We are ignorant of the particular scurvy trick played by Francois Perdryer on Villon, happily so perhaps, if his mischief-making tongue deserved a tithe of the treatment prescribed for it in Villon's unsavoury recipe.*

CXXXI. *Taillevent, the Mrs. Beeton of the day, wrote a "livre de cuisine."*

CXXXII. *Clement Marot notes that in Villon's day appeared a little book called The sayings of Franc-Gontier, extolling the pastoral life, & to refute it another book entitled Franc-Gontier contradicted, which took a tyrant as its subject & wherein the life of a great lord of that time was satirised. Villon sets out to refute Franc-Gontier, but wisely determines not to meddle with tyrants.*

CXXXVI. *the walls where etc. Villon alludes to the Abbaye des dames de Montmartre. The stanza may contain a sneer at the nuns.*

CXL. *by our Lady etc. Written "brelare bigod" in the original. Villon's attempt at English has proved a puzzle to commentators, but the first of these Clement Marot explains it properly, par dieu et par notre Dame !*

CXLI. *public school, obviously a euphemism for an establishment of quite another kind.*

CXLII. *It is probable that the Noë mentioned in this stanza is the same person who took a third of the whipping that Katherine de Vauselles obtained for Villon.*

Henry Cousin was the Paris hangman & executioner.

VILLON'S GOOD COUNSEL.

Colin de Cayeux, one of the gang who robbed the Collège de Navarre. He was finally hanged after many crimes committed.

CXLVII. *The blind men belonging to the hospital of the Quinze-Vingts had to furnish a certain number of helpers or mourners to escort dead bodies that were buried in the cemetery of the Saints Innocents.*

CLIII. *Danish Holgar, the hero of the romance of Ogier the Dane, the great protector of female innocence.*

CLX. *Jean de Calays, patriot & anthologist. A wealthy bourgeois of Paris who during the English occupation formed a plot to rescue the capital from them. It was discovered & he saved his life by paying large sums. He compiled the "Jardin de Plaisance," a collection of contemporary poems.*

CLXIII. *A tomb? etc. The chapel of St. Avoye was the only one in Paris not situated on the ground floor, hence no one could be buried in the church.*

CLXVII. *loaves of St. Stephen, i.e., stones.*

CLXIX. *As regards the executors named by Villon, Bellefaye was criminal lieutenant to the Provost of Paris, Colombel & Jouvenel were prosperous merchants, Jacques Raguyer we have met before, & nothing much is known of Bruneau or Jacques James, except that the latter was the owner of a bagnio, & is described as a miser in a previous passage of the Great Testament. No doubt Villon had some satiric purpose in coupling these names together, but the secret of the jest seems lost to us.*

CLXXIV. *Guillaume de Ru, one of the priests associated with Guillaume de Villon at Saint Benoît la Bientournée.*

BALLADE WHEREIN VILLON CRIES ALL FOLK MERCY.

fifteen ribs, one rib was supposed to be missing from the male skeleton since the day when Eve was created.

FINIS.



